

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES  
Jeremiah 20:9

We have been in this series of "favorite Bible verses" for a number of months now and today we bring this series to an end. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will start a study of the book of Acts. But for today we're looking at Jeremiah 20, verse 9...

Jeremiah 20:9

I would like for us to consider Jeremiah 20, verse 9 under two main points:

1. The true prophet of God has no other option than to be a prophet, and
2. True believers stay the course.

**1. The true prophet of God has no other option than to be a prophet**

After having reviewed, some months back, my various "life verses" (Romans 8:1, Matthew 5:6, Isaiah 66:2b and finally Job 42:12a) we began looking at some of my favorite verses: verses that I consider dear even if they are not on the level of being my "life verse." These "favorite verses" were (and are) favorites in the sense that **I come back to these verses again and again** – usually in the context of counseling.

And so it has been, now two times that I can recall, when a young man has asked to meet with me regarding whether or not God's call might be upon his life to become a pastor and preacher.

Now there is a difference between being a pastor and being a preacher. Many years ago, I found myself convicted by Jesus' words in John 10 regarding the good shepherd who "calls his sheep by name." I felt convicted because I could not call by name a number of people who were regular attenders of the church that I pastored. I had been pretty good with all the people's names up until it reached around eleven or twelve hundred. It was like my mind had become like a glass that was simply full to the top, and to pour any more NEW names in meant that some of the OLD names needed to flow out. I knew that my role was changing from that of truly being a pastor to these people to merely being a preacher. Long gone were the days of regular hospital visitation, visits with new members or doing pre-

marital counseling. Others had taken on these pastoral kinds of roles and I had become a mere mouthpiece for the church leaders. Sure I was still a preacher – a modern day prophet of God – but I was no longer much of a pastor. And that bothered me greatly.

So when I had these guys ask to meet with me regarding their futures I wanted to find out what their heart is. For one can be a preacher without having a pastor's heart, just as one can be a pastor and be a lousy preacher. **The goal is, I believe, to do both well.** But what was the heartbeat of these guys? That's what I wanted to know.

So I met with them. And each time, Jeremiah 20 verse 9 came up. And here is why...

Jeremiah, as you probably know, is called "The Weeping Prophet." Part of the reason for this is because Jeremiah didn't really enjoy his role as a prophet against Jerusalem and Judah. His message was not a positive one. Instead it was a consistent **message of condemnation** to the nation for its corrupt leadership and flirtation with idolatry. But the thing that really got Jeremiah into hot water was his insistence that God was about to use Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans (also called the Babylonian Empire) as his instrument of judgment against Judah. That is, God was going to use an UNGODLY nation to bring judgment against those known as the people of God. Such an idea was abhorrent to Judah and its leaders. But because **Jeremiah wouldn't back down**, he faced the consequences of his speaking out. Let's read what happened to him...

#### Jeremiah 38:1-6

Here, because Jeremiah spoke what he believed God wanted him to say, he paid dearly for his refusal to just remain silent.

Any fellow thinking of going into the ministry would do well to consider the life of Jeremiah. For if you have a desire to truly preach God's word, sooner or later you are going to end up saying things that, as they say, "step on people's toes." And while some will accept that kind of preaching others will let you know they're not interested in hearing it. And you'll pay the consequences for that.

Or to put it another way, the pulpit is no place for a politician.

- If your goal is to make people happy, then don't become a preacher.
- If you are concerned very greatly for your family's health and well being you would likely do well to consider a different occupation
- Or as I heard a man say one time, "If you can do ANYTHING other than be a preacher or pastor, do it."

The point being that a man's becoming a pastor and preacher had better be **SO DEEP AND SO SETTLED** in his being that there is simply no question that he is doing what he should be doing.

When, nine years ago I resigned my role as pastor over the church that I had pastored for some 25 years **I was actually a bit taken back** by the question of one or two people if I was going to go back into real estate.

"Back into real estate?" How could they even ask that? I had left real estate for the pastorate. Sure, real estate is a great profession. And when I was in it I enjoyed it greatly. And one can earn a very good income in real estate. But how could I ever think of **GOING BACK** once I've been a pastor and preacher?

In John Newton's autobiography there is an epilogue at the end, not written by Newton, regarding how his life ended. Reading between the lines it seems quite clear that as Newton became quite old, he became blind, lost most of his hearing, and his memory lost a good amount of its earlier sharpness. People could clearly sense that Newton would do well to quit. But when the idea of ceasing preaching came up to him he said, "I cannot stop. What! Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can still speak?" That is: he may have been blind, he may not have been able to hear, and his memory may not have been as sharp as it once was. But he could still **SPEAK...he could still PREACH**. And if that was the case then he was not about to quit!

This is what Jeremiah is talking about here in Jeremiah 20, verse 9. Sure, it would be easier to just stay silent. You're not likely to get into trouble by just staying silent! But Jeremiah felt as though **he simply COULD NOT stay silent...even if he tried**. For God's word was in him like a burning

fire. And he knew he would be weary trying to hold it all in. Indeed, he knew he could not.

(And just in case you are wondering, even though the pulpit and reins of this church will be handed over to a much younger man in less than 3.5 years, the plan is that I will still be here: to teach, to fill in for that new senior pastor and to do what I can to help this congregation and the spread of the gospel. So, like Newton, while I may eventually become but a shadow of my earlier self, as long as God gives me breath, I too want to speak up for him.)

So to these young fellows considering becoming ministers of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, I wanted to find out just **how GREAT was the BURNING in them** to become the very thing they were wondering about.

Now there were and are many things that either of these men might do for Christ and his kingdom short of becoming a pastor and preacher.

- They could teach,
- they could lead,
- they might become deacons or elders,
- they could get involved in door to door evangelism,
- they could financially support the work of the church

Many things could be done by them. But to feel as though they **simply HAD TO PREACH**...or as Newton put it, "had to speak." That was the issue. **Was there a BURNING in their souls?**

For unless there was that kind of BURNING in their souls...well...they would have to deal with that question. I wasn't about to tell them what to do either way. They would have to deal with the question about the degree to which there was a burning in their souls to preach, or not.

Interestingly enough, both of these young men (though now much older, as these conversations were years ago) are today very active in church life...but neither of them went on to become preaching pastors.

## 2. True believers stay the course.

Like many of you, I recently learned of Josh Harris' decision not only to divorce his wife, but also to leave the faith. Josh gained some notoriety within evangelical Christianity when, back in 1997, he wrote the book, I Kissed Dating Goodbye. I read Harris' book and found it to be a good encouragement to singles to **stop casually giving parts of their heart away** to this guy or that girl when, in the end, a lifelong relationship was not going to be happening. It was, more than anything else, a challenge to keep oneself – to preserve one's virtue and sexual drive – for your future wife or husband only.

Following the book's publication Harris went on to get married and become a pastor of a church that theologically would be considered a sister to Burning Hearts. But now Josh's marriage has gone up in smoke and, for reasons unstated, so has his faith.

When I learned of this, almost the first words that came out of my mouth were, "Another one bites the dust." Indeed, that line – "another one bites the dust" – kept going over in my mind so much that I texted Nate Garland to see if he might sing the song "Another One Bites the Dust" at the end of this service. But then Nate texted me asking if I really knew what that song was about. I wrote back that I didn't, so I looked up the words. It's about **gangs fighting it out and shooting one another**. Nate's point was maybe that's not the **best** song to end a church service with! Good point, Nate!

But aren't we all growing weary of hearing of this one...or that one...who spiritually "bites the dust"? These who

- no longer go to church or
- no longer believe in Christ?

This past week Ruth and I finished watching The Godfather trilogy of films directed by Francis Ford Coppola and starring Al Pacino as Michael Corleone. The film series was based upon the book The Godfather by Mario Puzo.

If you have never read the book or seen the films it is about a Sicilian Mafia family and their rise to power in the world of crime here in the U.S. As Michael ages, he increasingly expresses regret for his life of crime and shows a real desire to change – to become legitimate and above board. Before a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church he confesses his sins seeking to be made right with God.

One would think that the longer people live – the closer and closer they come to death – that this would be what we would see and hear of more often. And sometimes we do. But so often we are hearing of a church leader who no longer even attends church let alone leads a church. Or we hear of couples abandoning one another...and some after literally DECADES together.

This breaks our hearts even as it must break the heart of God.

Jeremiah 20 verse 9 is not only about the heart of the Old Testament prophet or the modern day preacher. It is also about every **one of us** when Jeremiah ends that sentence with the words, "I am weary of holding it in, indeed I cannot." That is, even though Jeremiah didn't even WANT to speak on God's behalf, he found he could not do anything other than that. There was a CONSTRAINT upon his mouth and life. He was, in a sense, being controlled by God.

When people abandon the faith they are showing or expressing that they are not under that kind of constraint. God, in a sense, has become insignificant to them. And for that to happen raises the question – and I think it is a very legitimate question – as to whether they were EVER truly under God's control or what we might call "the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

I may not be making myself clear. My point is that in Jeremiah 20 verse 9, Jeremiah says that his life...his choices and decisions were beyond himself. If left just to him he would stop speaking for God... he would stop being a mouthpiece for God. But try as he might he found he could not do anything BUT THAT. He would decide he would just shut up and no longer speak for God but God's work in his soul was SO DEEP and SO STRONG that he could not help but speak up. He was under God's control.

But when these people abandon God, abandon Christ and abandon the faith they are raising the question as to whether they were **EVER REALLY PART OF THE FOLD, PART OF GOD'S FAMILY**. They may have been well-known preachers or Christian writers. They may have, like Josh Harris, become a household name. But if they were truly **GOD'S MAN** or **GOD'S WOMAN** then how could they ever

have walked away from it all? For if they were TRULY TRUE BELIEVERS they would have stayed the course.

Listen, anyone can start a race. The issue is not whether we can start a race, the issue is can we finish.

Some of us went on a hike yesterday. If you missed it you missed a nice morning hike along the beautiful Tucquan Glen trail. The hike was less than 3 miles and less difficult of a hike than what some of us had remembered. But as we hiked I thought of my 91-year old dad. If he had been there, **he could have started** out with us. **But he could not have finished.** For his health is now such that he simply would not have been able to do the hike. He could start but he could not finish.

By virtue of the fact that you are here this morning, or you are listening to this sermon on a podcast, **you have started** on this Christian journey. I'm glad you're on the trail.

But starting and finishing are two different things. And the challenge now is to finish and to finish well. Don't let anything pull you away. Do God's will. Let his word BURN DEEPLY in your heart and then give to others what has been burning in your soul.

Amen? Amen.