

O hey, what are you talking about? And the room falls silent. We've all been there haven't we? You walk in the room and the conversation stops; awkward glances are exchanged and the once tight circle of conversation scatters to the four corners of the room. Or you're in the car with someone and you know they are talking about you on their cell phone. Unless your birthday is coming up, these situations make us uncomfortable don't they? Nobody likes to be talked about behind their back, especially right to their face. We hate to consider what others say when we aren't around. Our name or our reputation is important to us. We like to have people like us. In our sermon text we have maybe the most unpopular person in the Old Testament. Jeremiah.

We heard a little bit about him last week. When he was thrown into a cistern, stuck in the mud. But this wasn't the only time Jeremiah had experienced hatred. He was also thrown in the stocks outside the temple just for preaching the Word of the LORD. The king burned his writings. When he tried to leave Jerusalem he was charged with treason and thrown in a dungeon. People mocked him because what he said God told him hadn't happened yet. Finally when the Babylonians took most of Judah captive, he stayed behind. And even then the remnant wouldn't listen to him. That was what really bothered Jeremiah. Not the physical punishment, not the imprisonment. The king was disgusted at even the mentioning of the name of Jeremiah and in turn the name of the LORD.

Even Jeremiah's closest friends and neighbors didn't want to hear his preaching. Later Jeremiah would write:

***I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!"  
All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying,  
"Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."***

In our OT lesson for today, it is Jeremiah's neighbors who are plotting against him, plotting his death. They wanted to destroy Jeremiah, so that his name and his preaching of the name of the LORD would no longer be remembered. They no longer wanted to hear what the LORD had to say.

But this kind of plotting isn't unique to the men of Anathoth—we are guilty of the same thing. All of mankind has schemed against the name of the LORD and our plot has been exposed. Our all-knowing God has intensely examined our hearts, our minds, and our emotions and he has seen that we are an active part of the plot against him. We have plotted to destroy that Name every time we have failed to witness about the Christ. It's easy to do isn't it? You shy away from opportunities to talk about Christ, sometimes the only time you even mention his name, you exclaim it when things don't go your way. We act as if our daily lives have nothing to do with our Sunday morning ritual. The Israelites who plotted against Jeremiah were not irreligious people. Their speech was littered with references to the temple of the LORD. But they felt like just having the temple in Jerusalem would be enough. God couldn't punish them, because then he would be allowing disaster upon his own house. Is that so different from how we treat Christ's sacrifice? How often do you act however you wish, comforting yourself that Christ will always be there to forgive you? Using your Christian freedom as license for sin.

But it's not only the tree you seek to destroy. When others stick out for their generosity, for their love, or their other good works, do you join in on the jealous gossip? They only gave that much because they have a lot more than me. **Instead of spurring one another on,** we spar with those who make us look bad. Because we convince ourselves that God doesn't require good deeds; we become content to just talk about being a Christian. A spiritual bandwagon jumper. Praise God while things are good for me; pray to him when things aren't. We act as if that's all God wants. Occasional praise and prayer. **Bible Study is just for new Christians or those who want to show off what they know. Canvassing is a special gift given to a select few.** And you destroy the fruits of faith before they can even blossom.

When our lives no longer reflect the love of Christ, we have cut his Name off from the land of the living. We have removed his name from the lives of those experiencing their time of grace. You can't share him with others when you don't share him with yourself. Personal Bible study falls by the wayside. Even when you get together with fellow believers, conversation is steered towards shopping bargains, sports, and the weather. Sometimes it seems it would be easier to talk about politics than Scriptures.

Then it becomes even harder to share the message with those who don't know it; because you don't even know it that well. What if they ask something I don't know? What if they challenge the Bible? And we convince ourselves it would be better to have someone else witness to them about God's Name. Someone who knows more; anyone but you.

That's how it went in Israel. They had experienced the days when God showered grace upon grace in their lives. When David ruled the land; when Solomon built the temple. The Name of God was proclaimed throughout the land. Life was good. Things were so good that they began to credit themselves and lower the Name of God a little. God didn't receive all the praise when the harvest was bountiful. The Word was no longer an active part of their lives and the next generation took notice, or rather didn't take notice of their God. And people forgot the name of the LORD; their association to the temple was more important than their relationship with their God. Ignorance and apathy slowly became violent plots against the Name of the LORD and his messengers. Suddenly when God spoke he didn't promise a land flowing with milk and honey, but rather captivity. Captivity by a nation whom they did not know, as punishment from a God they no longer put first. This captivity shocked Israel. God couldn't allow this, they said. But, how do we react when people speak to us about our spiritually apathetic lives? We get angry at them. Even though it is God's message. Our hearts plot evil against them. Our pride longs to cut them down to size. But God sent his Word to the Israelites and to us for the same reason. To show us that our plots will end in captivity outside of the glory of God.

But, our God has been planning all while mankind's sinful nature has been plotting. The more he exposed our plots against him, the more he revealed his Name, his love, his plan for us. Though we had wished to destroy the tree and its fruit, to cut off the name of God from the living. Despite the fact that our sinful nature wished to never hear the name of God again; he sent his one and only Son to reveal his Name more fully. That he is unconditional love. You see Christ's name hung in shame upon the tree because of our abuse of God's grace. He suffered and died for all the times we didn't think our faith needed to be accompanied by actions. And he proclaims his Name and this plan to the nations. Offering us grace, not as a freedom to sin, but a freedom from sin, freedom for works of service. Christ's obedience was more than lip service. Our Savior sought out opportunities to demonstrate his love. He didn't simply say I love you and leave it at that. He took the deaf and mute man out of the crowd to demonstrate his love. He went into Jerusalem during Holy Week knowing what awaited him. He experienced excruciating pain because it was the will of the Father to save mankind from its plot of sin. He died on a cross while other men mocked him.

And he nourishes the fruits of faith in a variety of ways. First he gives us his Word where he reveals his plan of love for all of mankind. Tells us to rely upon his strength. He encourages us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received. And he sends his Counselor to encourage us. The Holy Spirit places opportunities in our lives to display our fruits of faith, all while giving us the words to show men their sins and to spur fellow believers to love and good deeds.

God's plan of salvation is accomplished. We can be certain the Name of Christ cannot be cut off from the land of the living. His Word accomplishes exactly what he desires. The salvation he earned us has changed our daily lives. We no longer live fearing the Name of a God. When our God carefully examines us, he sees the Name of Christ and what he has accomplished on our behalf. Now, we excitedly wait for his Name to be proclaimed forever more. When all of mankind will bow before our Christ and proclaim that he is LORD.

His second coming is the reason why we can't help but discuss and demonstrate God's love. He offers salvation free to anyone who will trust on him. His work is the most important work that has been done in the history of the world. His life of love and mercy demonstrates to us the God we have. This does change our daily lives. Fruits of faith flow naturally from the redeemed child of God. We look for opportunities to demonstrate our fruits of faith and to encourage the next generation to do the same. How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called his children—we exclaim along with John. This is the Name we have to share with everyone. No longer do we plot against the Name of the LORD, but we are a part of his Name, his plan of salvation. We can join together with the Psalmist and say to everyone ***Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this.*** AMEN.