

City of Steeples! Milwaukee is known as the City of Steeples. Do you know how many church steeples tower over our metro Milwaukee area neighborhoods? You might be shocked! I know I was. There are over 700 houses of worship. That means there are over 700 pastors preaching over 700 sermons this Sunday. You have plenty of options.

God’s people at Jeremiah’s time also had options, he wasn’t the only preacher in town. That’s why the LORD, The Preacher, decided to have a word with the preachers. You may not be a professional preacher, but all of you still have the option and responsibility of picking what preacher you’ll be listening to. That’s why today’s message: “**The Preacher Preaches to Preachers,**” is also for you.

Do you know what the average attention span is? For goldfish it’s 9 seconds. For humans it’s 8 seconds. Back in 2000, it was 15 seconds. Stories keep people’s attention longer. That’s especially true with the generations that have grown up on video games. In general, we think better, and pay attention longer with mental pictures or images.

The next time you pick up your Bible to read it, notice how the Holy Spirit uses plenty of pictures and images. Think of the Bible Stories you still remember because of the picture or flannelgraph used. When God had a special message to give to his people, he would often use pictures with the dreams and visions he gave them.

Two immediately come to mind. There’s OT Jacob. After he stole his twin brother’s birthright, he had to run for his life to stay alive. One night while he was sleeping, the Bible tells us: **He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.”**

God could, just as easily, have said this to Jacob through another human. Instead, he used a dream. With this visual aid, God was telling Jacob, “*Your prayers will be answered! I am with you.*”

And then there’s NT Paul. While Paul was sleeping, the Bible tells us: **Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”** God could, just as easily, have said this to Paul through another human. Instead, he used a vision in which a man was begging Paul to come and help them!

Dreams and visions get people’s attention, but they can also mislead. How many times have you awakened in the middle of the night from a vivid dream, but you didn’t know if it meant anything? Or, you have a dream but can’t remember the details. In the Bible, kings would have vivid dreams and visions but didn’t know what they meant.

At Jeremiah’s time, the people loved hearing about dreams and their interpretations. Some preachers made up dreams to gain followers and to lead the people in the direction they wanted, rather than give them the spiritual guidance God intended.

The LORD, The Preacher, says: **I have heard that the prophets who prophesy lies in my name have said. They say, “I have had a dream! I have had a dream!” How long will this be in the hearts of these lying prophets? These prophets proclaim the fantasies of their own hearts. They think they can make my people forget my name with the dreams each one tells his neighbor, the way their fathers forgot my name because of Baal.**

God’s people found others, besides the Lord’s prophet, who could offer alternative opinions and chose to believe them. Years ago, you could figure out who the false prophets were when they’d say things like: “*This is what Baal said to me in a dream.*” At Jeremiah’s time, it became much harder to figure out the false prophets from God’s true prophets, since both claimed their dreams came from the Lord.

Case in point! There was a time when God told Jeremiah to put the yoke of an ox, a heavy wooden timber, on his neck and tell the people: *“For 40 years you will be in captivity!”* That’s an attention grabber! But then, another preacher, Hananiah, took the yoke off Jeremiah’s neck, broke it, and told the people they’d only be in captivity for 2 years! No wonder Jeremiah was frustrated by the preachers of his day. The job of an OT prophet was to tell the people what God wanted them to know. That’s what Jeremiah was doing.

We have similar issues today. As we strive to faithfully share the truth of God’s Word to win the souls of both young and old with our preaching and teaching, it seems the false prophets come out ahead. Two of the largest religions started with supposed *“visions from God.”*

- Mohammed claims he had a vision in which he heard the voice of the Lord tell him to proclaim that there was no God but Allah and to record his vision in the Koran, the Bible of Islam.
- Joseph Smith claims in his first vision he saw God the Father and Jesus Christ, and he asked them of all the groups which group was right? Which should he join? They answered, *“Don’t join any, they’re all wrong.”* In another vision an angel directed him to some golden plates. His translation of those plates is The Book of Mormon.

Very vivid pictures that catch our attention. Here's where it hits close to home. If there are over 700 churches, can everyone preach the truth? The best entertainers usually draw the biggest crowds. Do their dreams and presentations give a better understanding of the Bible’s truth, lead them to the Savior Jesus and his will for our lives?

In Jeremiah’s time, the people were fascinated with the visions. But they led people away from God, not to him. So God did something about it. The Preacher asked these “preachers” a series of questions: **Am I a God who is only nearby, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.**

These preachers were poking the bear by suggesting that God was limited in his reach and power, and they could hide from him. With three simple questions, God brushed that kind of talk aside. God saw what they were doing and heard what they were saying. Nothing escapes his notice. He’s all-powerful, all-knowing and always present.

In today’s lesson God’s saying: *“Stick with me and my Word”* in a kind of hidden-in-plain-sight way. Here's a valuable Bible tip: if a word or phrase is repeated, it should catch your attention. It’s significant. What phrase did you hear repeated 3 times in the verses I just read, and a total of 5 times in our lesson’s 6 verses? **Declares the LORD!**

**“Declares”** ... listen to what the **LORD** is saying. The number of times he speaks through dreams or visions is few and far between. He consistently speaks through his written word, the Bible. The **LORD**, all capital letters, is the one who does this. That’s a very special OT name for God. That’s why it’s spelled in all caps. He’s identifying himself as the God of free and faithful love.

**Is not my word like a fire? declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?** How many uses does fire have when camping? 1) Keeps you warm. 2) Gives you light. 3) Cooks food. 4) Purifies water to drink. 5) Keeps critters away.

God says his Word is like a fire! How many uses does his Word have? 1) Warms your cold heart! 2) Lights your path through life! 3) Feeds your soul! 4) Purifies you from sin! 5) Keeps Satan away!

In The Preacher’s sermon he said, **Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream. But let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully.** There’s nothing wrong with telling dreams as long as it leads people into God’s Word, and doesn’t contradict what God says.

Without the Word of God, we’d all be miserable unbelievers on the highway to hell. You wouldn’t know who Jesus is and how he lived, died and rose

from the dead for you. You wouldn't know that by faith in Jesus, you are forgiven, holy in God's sight, with your sights set on heaven.

With over 700 preachers preaching this morning, you have plenty of options. Some churches will wow you with a lot of neat stories and music and other things to keep your attention. That's fine.

But it comes down to this ...

- Did you get the truth of God's Word?
- Did you better understand his love, his will and his ways for you?
- Is the message of your sins and your Savior's forgiving grace what catches your attention?
- Will it stay on your mind and heart as you leave and during the week?