

Fire that Cannot Be Put Out

Jeremiah Chapter 20

When Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, 2 Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the Lord. 3 On the next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "Pashhur is not the name the Lord has called you, but rather Magor-missabib. 4 For thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am going to make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and while your eyes look on, they will fall by the sword of their enemies. So I will give over all Judah to the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will carry them away as exiles to Babylon and will slay them with the sword. 5 I will also give over all the wealth of this city, all its produce and all its costly things; even all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give over to the hand of their enemies, and they will plunder them, take them away and bring them to Babylon. 6 And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have falsely prophesied.'"

7 O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived;

You have overcome me and prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all day long;

Everyone mocks me.

8 For each time I speak, I cry aloud;

I proclaim violence and destruction,

Because for me the word of the Lord has resulted

In reproach and derision all day long.

9 But if I say, "I will not remember Him

Or speak anymore in His name,"

Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire

Shut up in my bones;

And I am weary of holding it in,

And I cannot endure it.

10 For I have heard the whispering of many,

“Terror on every side!

Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!”

All my trusted friends,

Watching for my fall, say:

“Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him

And take our revenge on him.”

11 But the Lord is with me like a dread champion;

Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.

They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed,

With an everlasting disgrace that will not be forgotten.

12 Yet, O Lord of hosts, You who test the righteous,

Who see the mind and the heart;

Let me see Your vengeance on them;

For to You I have set forth my cause.

13 Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord!

For He has delivered the soul of the needy one

From the hand of evildoers.

14 Cursed be the day when I was born;

Let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!

15 Cursed be the man who brought the news

To my father, saying,

“A baby boy has been born to you!”

And made him very happy.

16 But let that man be like the cities

Which the Lord overthrew without relenting,

And let him hear an outcry in the morning

And a shout of alarm at noon;
17 Because he did not kill me before birth,
So that my mother would have been my grave,
And her womb ever pregnant.
18 Why did I ever come forth from the womb
To look on trouble and sorrow,
So that my days have been spent in shame?

Tonight we have before us a brief episode in the story of the life of Jeremiah the Prophet and a short prayer of his that has come down to us from what is definitely a dark chapter of his book. But there is one bright spot here especially that I want to draw our attention to. And the main point is this: The indestructible power of the word of God gives courage in times of darkness. May the weight of this passage be impressed deeply upon you so that it will help you to take courage in the Lord as this word has done and still does for me.

Here we have just read of Jeremiah's difficult circumstances. He was in a pit of discouragement. It was a dark place. Where did these trials come from? He did not deserve to be so unjustly treated by the Jews. He had been faithful to do all that the LORD had commissioned him to do by speaking to the people of Israel. But God had given him an unpopular message: that judgment is coming upon the whole land and everyone in it because of the treacherous backsliding of the people. And as far as we know he did not win over a single convert in his lifetime of faithfully speaking the truth and warning his brothers and sisters with tears flowing down his cheeks. No one listened or heeded his words and when he spoke the truth it brought sharp persecution and humiliation and rejection for the sake of the word of

God. He was rejected by his neighbors, his family, the priests and so called-prophets, his friends, and finally he was rejected by all the people and even the king.

It has been said about him that: "he was the man of sorrows before the coming of The Man of Sorrows". And the opposition was not only verbal abuse. He was confined in public in what our English translations call a "stocks" but all we can assume is that this was a painful and humiliating device that contorted his body and was designed to break his will. In chapter 20 verse 2 it says that he was beaten by Pashur the priest which was possibly so severe that it could be considered an attempt to kill him. The language here implies a severe thrashing with multiple blows.

Now that we see where Jeremiah's distress came from let's consider the depth of his feeling at this point. Chapter 20 verses 7 through 18 form a prayer that I commend to you all to read thoughtfully. But it is a strange read. Like some of the psalms you will read here raw emotion and even complaining to God. He is honest about his struggle to go on and he pours out his heart before the LORD. Look again at the ninth verse where he says:

But if I say, "I will not remember Him
Or speak anymore in His name,"
Then in my heart it (His word) becomes like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
And I am weary of holding it in,
And I cannot endure it.

Jeremiah was tempted to grow weary in doing good. He seems to waver between hopelessness and steadfast faith. How many of us have been in this state of mind and feeling even within the space of one prayer? He was in a dark place and he was deeply discouraged. He was in a spiritual depression of mind and heart. How can I say this? Because he said things that he ought not to have said. He started to curse things and he cursed the day of his birth. But you must know that he never cursed God and nor is there any rebuke from the LORD for all of his complaining. And we can take courage from his example even here at his lowest. In this moment it is good to remember as one has said that, "times of darkness do not disqualify a person from salvation."

Now in order to see the comfort for the downcast follower of Christ and how to take courage from this text, we have to see some of the critical ways that the promises and the calling of Jeremiah apply to us today under the New Covenant. Listen to how the LORD chose him and called him by His grace alone and gave him a great commission. In Jeremiah Chapter One God told him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." The LORD said to him, "I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." God said, "All that I command you, you shall speak" and "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth." He, like every Christian, was warned that the road would be hard and that people would insult him and persecute him and say all kinds of evil against him because of the word of the LORD. God told him that, "They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," Now here we come to the point of great encouragement: The LORD made a promise to Jeremiah, "Don't be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, declared the LORD". And Jeremiah like us was made an ambassador of the One to whom

all authority had been given in heaven and on earth. The LORD told him, “I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” And, “Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it shall consume them.”

How easily we forget the promises of God and our privileges and calling in the Gospel! How easy it is to let our difficulties, and trials, and even the enemy of our souls speak with the loudest voice to our hearts! As servants of the Living God we have an eternal enemy who has a lying and slanderous tongue that never rests, always busy at the work of accusing the children of God. His goal is to quench the life – to put out the flame of the candle of every believer in Christ and if he could he would silence us from ever speaking the truth. This is the warfare of every true Christian. May God help us to see our calling and our privileges in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to have ears to hear the indestructible word of the LORD in our times of darkness.

And at the moment of his testing Jeremiah gave voice to a thought that came into his mind, “I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name.” He considered this for a fleeting moment. What if I lay down like a dumb dog and never bark? What if I just stay silent? What if I even forget the Name of the LORD? But the Holy Spirit of God will not be thwarted by anything or anyone and He will not be prevented from His work by the failings of his people. One writer has said that the words “But God” are overflowing with the Gospel. Here in chapter 20 there are two such verses that overflow. Verse 9 continues, “Then in my heart...” or you can read it “But in my heart it (his word) becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in and I cannot endure it.” Verse 11 echoes the promise of God from chapter

1: "But the LORD is with me like a dread champion". Henry has said of this moment that, "When the prophet of the LORD was bound, the word of the LORD was not." The word of God is indestructible. The Holy Spirit compelled Jeremiah to speak. The love of Christ constrained him. Silence became intolerable. God's word gives courage even in a time of fear and doubt.

Here is the irony. Jeremiah was distressed. And God increased his distress for a time in order to lift him out of the pit of depression. Self-pity always leads into darkness. But how merciful our God is! How patient with our frail and unstable hearts! See how he will not let Jeremiah go. He will not allow his word and his promise to fail in one life. And how the Lord changes Jeremiah's heart! The work of the Holy Spirit of God upon his despondent heart is not to take away his suffering but to actually increase his sense of discontent! Weariness. In answer to prayer! Here is a strange thought but it holds a great comfort. Here was a faithful man. The word of the LORD became like a burning fire in his heart. What does this mean? The Holy Spirit gave him great conviction. And what a comfort this was to a discouraged servant who saw no fruit to his labors. He had firm conviction and a love of the truth. He was 'valiant for truth' as the AV puts it. His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, he says.

Discouraged Christian: have you prayed like this? Out of the depths he cried out to God - the One who knew him and had called him before he had been born.

Jeremiah lived to see the vindication of his life and work in the word of God. The LORD fulfilled his word and the Babylonians invaded the land and all of the judgments came to pass in every detail. God's word is indestructible. The word of the Lord carries out his will and accomplishes what he wishes. Against the power of the word, nothing can stand. For the word

of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. In chapter 26 verse 29 the LORD speaks of this vindication and the doom of the false prophets when he says to him, "Is not my word like a fire? and like a hammer which shatters the rock?" . Remember that God's word shows its power in two ways - in tearing down and in building up. To accept his word, is to abide in Christ and bear fruit the fruit of eternal life in keeping with repentance; to reject it, is to not see life but to abide under the wrath of God. To have the hunger for God's word like Jeremiah!: in chapter 15 verse 16 he says "Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by your name, O LORD God of hosts.

Finally, this passage overflows with comfort for a discouraged or depressed follower of Christ. For one thing you can take comfort that to be downcast does not disqualify you. Now remember the promises of His word so that you can take courage from the heart-cry of the prayer in this text. We should be encouraged that the downcast soul is not far from Christ for being downcast. The LORD draws near to the broken hearted and wounded soul who belongs to him. This may be you tonight. All I have for you is this text. Jeremiah here commands you to sing to the LORD, praise the LORD! For he has delivered the soul of the needy one from the hand of the evildoers. We live in a time that is far more evil than Jeremiah's day. We must have the word of God in our heart where the Holy Spirit can illuminate and magnify the truth to us in order to drown out the lies of the enemy and the vain words of men. The fire of God's word cannot be put out. Does it ever burn within you? Is it your greatest joy and the delight of your heart? Take courage from God's indestructible word that your greatest enemy is defeated and

that if you are in Christ he will forgive your iniquity and your sin he will remember no more. And
that if God is for us who is against us? Amen.