

THE WEEPING PROPHET

My son, Nick, is a rough-and-tumble little guy. He's always playing ball, or climbing trees, or wrestling with his brothers. On the outside he appears hard as nails, but underneath his tough persona Nick has a very tender heart.

I remember when he was four years old, I made a thoughtless, careless comment that hurt his feelings. Nick bowed his head and started to cry. I said, "Son, what's wrong?" He muttered, "Dad, my tears are starting to drip."

Like Nick, the prophet Jeremiah had a problem with dripping tears.

He's called "*the weeping prophet*".

Jeremiah had the *iron will of a lion* - and the *tender heart of a lamb*.

He stood for God valiantly and courageously. He was called by God to preach an unpopular message at a difficult time. He was rejected by his contemporaries - yet was faithful to declare God's Word. Jeremiah was perhaps the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets, yet tangible results in his ministry were minimal. Jeremiah invested his life in an ungrateful and unrepentant people who were headed for judgment - yet his words and tears combined to show he cared.

Once two men were talking about their churches when the first man mentioned they had fired their pastor. His buddy asked him why... "Well, he spoke too much about hell." He asked again, "*What about your new pastor, what does he speak on?*" The guy answered, "He speaks on hell, too." "*Are you going to fire him?*"

That's when the guy explained, "Oh no, when the old pastor spoke on hell he seemed to enjoy it, but when the new pastor speaks on hell he weeps."

It's interesting, when God has a harsh message to deliver He communicates it through a caring and compassionate messenger. He finds a man whose tear ducts are dripping. Jeremiah was a sensitive man who heralded a serious judgment.

Devotion Box - Broken Cisterns

In Jeremiah 2:13 God says, "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water."

When you tour Israel - all over the country - you find hollowed out cisterns. A cistern is a hole dug into the rock, situated to catch and store water run-off. The holes caught and stored rainfall, then were capped to prevent evaporation. Sometimes a cistern would develop a crack, and become useless.

Spiritually speaking, the world we live in is a cracked cistern. Its pleasures are quickly depleted, and unreliable. Often when they're needed they're not there. Whereas God is an eternal spring who constantly bubbles up with refreshment. We all have needs, but where to we go to meet those needs? Do we drink from the wellspring of God's love, or do we turn to the broken cisterns of this world?

THE ELEVENTH HOUR PROPHET

Jeremiah is also called "*the eleventh hour prophet*". He prophesied as God's clock of judgment struck midnight. He was the final call to the nation Judah.

Jeremiah oversaw the nation's fall to the Babylonians. Three times the foreign invaders defeated Jerusalem - in 605, 597, and 586 BC. The final invasion led to the destruction of the city and its Temple. Jeremiah witnessed his people's demise - and saw them led away to Babylon in shackles and chains. His sorrowful and mournful tear-filled dirges are recorded in the book of Lamentations.

It reminds me of the wedding reception in the church basement. Hung on the wall all around the room were framed Bible verses. Most of the verses spoke of the mercies of God, but not the verse that hung right over the newlyweds as they cut their cake. The plague quoted Matthew 3:7, "Flee from the wrath to come."

This was Jeremiah's message for over 40 years. He warned his people of a coming judgment, then witnessed the results of them ignoring that warning.

Devotion Box - Gadding About

Judah's spiritual state is summed up in verse 36, "Why do you gad about so much to change your way?" You're in one day, and you're out the next.

Recently, I read about the death of the man who wrote the song *Hokey Pokey*. It's reported the mortician had trouble preparing the body. He put his right foot in the casket, then his right foot came out. Then he put the man's left foot in and...

That's an awful joke, but it illustrates how a lot of people treat their commitment to the Lord. They'll vow to follow the Lord no matter what. Then the devil tosses them a bone, and they take the bait. There's no consistency to their commitment. Guys, we all need to stop *gadding about*, and get serious.

Bible Scan - Jeremiah 1-15

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah writes in verse 4, "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Before Jeremiah was *in utero*, he was *in the mind of God*. God conceived a purpose for Jeremiah before he was conceived in the womb.

I believe the same is true for you and me. Before you were a gleam in your father's eye – your Father in heaven ordained you for a specific ministry. *God's plan was on the go, even in utero*. Even in your mother's womb God molded you in accordance with His plan for your life. He has a specific designs for each of us.

Jeremiah says in verse 6, "Then said I: "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." The Hebrew word translated "youth" does not refer to an elementary aged child, but to a maturing young man – even as old as 20.

Age was a crucial factor in Hebrew culture. A priest could not begin his ministry until he was 30 years old. Perhaps this is why Jesus waited until He reached His thirties before he began His ministry. The Jews equated age with wisdom.

Once I invited a fellow to church, who told me he wouldn't go to a church unless the pastor was older than he was. I believe he was limiting God. In essence, he was saying God can only use old men. He can't use young men.

Jeremiah was reluctant to take up the call to ministry because of guys like that. He was afraid people would look down on him because of his youth.

God responds to Jeremiah in verse 7... "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak."

Here, God dismisses the excuse once and for all... "I can't serve the Lord because I'm too young." Hogwash! God doesn't look at age, but attitude...

Men and women of faith come in all ages.

Notice too, the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you". Jeremiah was a sensitive person. As a result he was vulnerable to subtle intimidation. He was effected by facial expressions. How often have we been intimidated by a disapproving scowl, or mocking smirk?

God warns Jeremiah not to let the feedback of people alter his message. Speak the truth in love, and let the chips fall where they may. The man of God looks past the faces, and focuses on the heart of the person he's trying to reach.

I'll never forget the lady who sat on the back row one Sunday. She had angry eyes and a blank stare. I was sure my words were bouncing off her like ping pong balls against

a brick wall. I was shocked to learn she gave her life to Jesus that morning. I was glad I spoke the truth, and wasn't intimidated by her face.

Jeremiah says in verse 9, "Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth." Every *work of God* always begins with a *touch from God*. He equips who He calls.

"See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant". Jeremiah will confront kings. The office of President or Premier is a notch below *Prophet*.

In the next verses God gives Jeremiah two visions that outline his ministry. In verse 11 he sees an almond tree. The Lord says "I am ready to perform My word."

The almond is one of the first trees to blossom. It flowers in mid-January. It's a harbinger of things to come - a leading indicator spring is on the way. Likewise, Jeremiah's ministry would be the first warning of the coming judgment.

In verse 13 Jeremiah sees a boiling pot coming from the north. He says, "Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land." Babylon is this pot of boiling judgment headed toward Judah.

In verses 17-19 God makes a bitter-sweet promise to Jeremiah. I'm sure he returned to this promise over and over again to gain comfort and assurance.

The Lord tells him in verse 17, "Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them. For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you," says the LORD, "to deliver you." It was comforting to know God would strengthen and deliver Jeremiah! But when you look closely at the prophecy, and examine the scope of the opposition Jeremiah will encounter, it's a extremely discomfoting.

Jeremiah will stand against kings, princes, priests, people. God says, "against the whole land". He'll hold the torch alone. He'll have to learn to stand alone.

There's an old saying, "Laugh and the world laughs with you. Weep and you weep alone." No one likes to be told of sin and judgment – and people tend to turn off anyone who tries to remind them. This was the rejection Jeremiah would face.

Devotion Box - Reserving Your Deepest Devotion

In 3:1 Jeremiah brings up the problem of revolving door marriages. Couples divorce to marry, and marry to divorce. He says that's how Judah has treated the Lord. , "You have played the harlot, with many lovers..." Guys, what's the object of your desire and affections – *is it pursuit, or place, or possession, or person?* Be careful to reserve for Jesus your deepest devotion.

Devotion Box - How To Stop A Spiritual Slide

In 3:22 God calls to his backsliding people, "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." It's interesting, the word "backsliding" occurs 16 times in the Bible, and 13 of the 16 times it appears in the book of Jeremiah. And of those 13 times, 7 times the word occurs in this one chapter, Jeremiah 3. Jeremiah is the book on backsliding – especially chapter 3.

And how do you avoid spiritual backsliding? 4:3 tells us, "Break up your fallow ground". In other words, repent! Take the backhoe of humility, and clear out the rocks and roots and crusty earth. Get rid of the obstacles between you and God. *You know what they are.* Ask the Lord to give you a soft and sensitive heart.

A WORD FROM YOUR PASTOR

In Jeremiah 3:15 God promises, "I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." The word "*pastor*" means *shepherd* – and this is a vital verse for any pastor who wants to be a shepherd according to God's heart. He needs to feed the flock with biblical insights. This is why Jesus told Peter three times, "If you love me, feed my sheep."

As your pastor I may disappoint you on occasion. If I can't accept your dinner invitation, or visit you in the hospital, or schedule an appointment at a convenient time - it's because I don't want to disappoint you in a far greater way. For me to be a pastor according to God's heart I have to prepare myself to teach God's Word.

Serving up a steady and substance-rich diet of spiritual food is a my top priority. I'm willing to risk failing you in other ways to serve you in the most crucial way.

MISPLACED FAITH

Only Jeremiah takes God's warnings seriously. The people of Jerusalem are numb to their spiritual condition, and deceived as to the consequences of their actions. After all they have the temple. The temple is God's footstool. He would never allow *Jerusalem* to fall – it's the home of God's *untouchable temple*.

Chapters 7-10 are known as Jeremiah's "*temple discourses*".

God sends Jeremiah into the gate of the temple to shatter people's illusions. He shouts in verse 4, "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'" In essence, Jeremiah tells them that if they keep up their sin, even their temple will be toppled.

Jeremiah's point is that possession of religious articles provides no immunity from God's judgment. You can go to church, carry a Bible, wear a crucifix around your neck, pray while holding onto a string of rosary beads – it's meaningless. God doesn't care about religious relics. He looks for heartfelt repentance and faith.

Jeremiah tells the Jews to go up the road a few miles to the ruins of Shiloh. It was once the home of the temple's predecessor, the tabernacle - but it's sacred occupant didn't save it from destruction. Even the Ark was taken by the Philistines. The tabernacle didn't save Shiloh, and the temple won't save Jerusalem.

Devotion Box - There is a Balm in Gilead

At the end of chapter 8 Jeremiah is overwhelmed with sorrow for his rebellious people. He cries out in verse 20, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." What's sad is that all Judah's troubles could've been averted.

Jeremiah says in verse 22, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?" There was healing available, but the people of Judah refused God's treatment.

Don't let that be the case tonight. If you hurt – if you're bruised, or battered, or bleeding - there is a poultice of love that can suck out the poisons. Just as there was a plant in Gilead used as a balm, likewise there is healing in Jesus. Ask the Lord Jesus to cover you with His grace, His love... and watch the healing begin.

HUNKER DOWN HEBREWS

The plot to assassinate Jeremiah shook him up, and led to his prayer in chapter 12... "Righteous are You, O LORD, when I plead with You; yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"

You'd laugh a little at Jeremiah's prayer if you hadn't prayed it yourself a time or two. In essence he says, "*Lord, I know you're always right and fair, but I've got a few questions... All I want to do is serve You, and people are trying to kill me?*"

At this point Jeremiah has been serving God for 18 years, and all he has to show for it are death-threats. He wants some relief. Where are the blessings?

God answers Jeremiah, but not in the way we'd anticipate. He says in verse 5, "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" In other words, *buck up, hunker down, pull up your bootstraps* – if you think it's difficult now, just wait, it's only going to get harder.

Jeremiah thinks the answer to his problem is a blessing – he wants relief - but God tells him he needs *endurance*. If he can't hang with the foot soldiers how will he survive the cavalry? Life will only get tougher – the challenges more severe. We live in a fallen world, and the longer we live the more opportunity exists for us to become a target for the pain and suffering it dishes out. None of us are immune. We need to develop a faith strong enough to stand the challenges.

Once the Chicago Bears were playing on Monday Night Football. Running back Walter Payton cut off tackle for a nice pick-up. One of the announcers commented, "Walter Payton has now carried the football for over 9 miles." But his sidekick put it in perspective, "Yes, and he's been knocked down every 4.6 yards." We need a faith that gets back up – keeps trusting God – a faith that helps us overcome.

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapel.org/stonemountain/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - January 7, 2001 - Bible Conference, January 17-19; Pastor Chuck, Wed 17th @ 7:30;
Gayle Erwin, Thu 18th @ 7:30 - Check out Calvary Connections (home fellowships) - CCCS Open House 2/4 @ 2:00

Next Bible Scan - January 14 - Jeremiah 16-39

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD" - Jeremiah 9:23-24

**Bible Scan
Memory
Verse**

FOUR POSSIBLE SOURCES OF FALSE PROPHECY

Jeremiah wants to know why the other prophets give a rosy forecast. Why does he alone predict gloom and doom - sword and famine? God answers him in 14:14, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of your heart."

Notice the four possible sources of a false prophecy...

A false vision - someone mistakes their own imagination for the Lord's will.

Divination - or demon inspired.

A worthless thing - a rumor, or foolish tale, or unsubstantiated story.

And *deceit* - a deliberate attempt to mislead. Apparently, the false prophets of Jeremiah's day were motivated by a little of all four.

THE PRECIOUS AND THE VILE

In 15:16 Jeremiah remembers his response when he first read the Word of God... "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart..." He consumed God's Word, and it satisfied his soul.

But in the years since, Jeremiah's disappointments in ministry had created in him a bitterness. He complains in verse 18, "Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?" He's accusing God of letting him down.

If you're active serving the Lord, beware - bitterness can poison your ministry.

It reminds me ship from the University of Miami that was doing environmental research in the Florida Keys. They were collecting data to help manage oil spills, when suddenly the boat hit a reef, and dumped 200 gallons of fuel into the ocean.

Trust me, it's easy to let a rotten attitude sour a ministry. You can pollute the very environment you're seeking to serve. Jeremiah's "woe is me" attitude led him to accuse God of unfaithfulness. But it was Jeremiah, not God who was guilty.

The Lord says to Jeremiah in verse 19, "If you return, then I will bring you back; you shall stand before Me; if you take out the precious from the vile..." We're all made up of part precious, part vile - and a continual sifting needs to take place in our heart at all times. We need to maintain an attitude of repentance.

WHEN GOD'S JUDGMENT IS A DONE DEAL

In chapter 14 Jeremiah tries to intercede for the nation - but God says in 15:1, "Even if Moses and Samuel (the two most prolific intercessors in all the Old Testament) stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people."

God's mind is made up. Judgment is a done deal.

God's patience has its limits. There's a time when the window of opportunity slams shut, and judgment is set in motion. Once it starts it runs its course.

Devotion Box - What A Wise Man Seeks

In light of the coming judgment the Lord concludes in 9:23-24, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD."

The world's values really haven't changed a lot over the last 2500 years. People still prioritize *wisdom, might, and riches* - *academics, athleticism, acquisition* - *mind, muscle, money* - but none of these things are lasting - none of them fill the emptiness inside the human heart. The most valuable commodity on earth is the knowledge of God. This is what the wise man seeks - to know God, to understand His ways and character. Only a connection with the God who created us brings lasting joy, and fills the void inside.