

It's Gonna Get Worse before it Gets Better
Jeremiah 20:7-13

A reckoning is coming, followed by redemption.

A reluctant pastor had to come before a young leader and let him know that all his sin would be atoned for!

Sins like: Oppression of the immigrant, widow, and fatherless. Stealing, murder, adultery, swearing falsely and bowing to the altar of a false God. In a word, he made his kingdom a den of robbers...sounding all too much like the temple in Jesus' day, and yet this was long before.

The pastor was given directions by God to use an illustration of a clay vessel to show, the young leader, that God made this leader's country, and because the leader refused to run it morally, it was to be smashed right in front of his face.

And it was. A greater nation came from the North, an equally great nation came from the South, and the leader's country in the middle was smashed.

All the while the pastor was given directive after directive to admonish the leader, but the leader refused to listen, even in the face of utter destruction at the hands of both of his enemies, North and South of his country.

Finally in a desperate attempt to survive the enemy from the North, the leader aligned himself with the South, who ironically was the kingdom that had enslaved his people just 800 years earlier. The enemy of my enemy is my friend they say, apparently no matter what they did as your enemy in the past.

And here is where our passage begins with our reluctant pastor, the Prophet Jeremiah, speaking to the Judeans under young King Jehoiakim.

And Jeremiah's reluctance is understandable when you see what the high priest Pashhur has done to him for his accused insolence of simply smashing a clay flask and warning the king?

Now, please for a moment let me set the scene for you. Just imagine a corrupt regime here in America of all places. Imagine that regime using that corruption to punish you for speaking out against it!

Ok maybe that is more likely than most of us would like to admit. BUT now imagine, if the National President of any Christian Denomination, including ours, was given the authority to punish your pastor for speaking the truth of God's Word to a corrupt government?

That, I think we can all agree, is unimaginable. At least in my lifetime in America, I would never suspect that could happen, especially if it meant putting a pastor in jail for speaking the Gospel.

China, ok we know that is happening, Nigeria; well, it just happened this week to a Christian school by a rogue group of rebels; but not Christian Leaders at last report but that is still unclear who murdered over 50 students. But English police are arresting pastors for preaching the gospel in the streets of London, Canadian Pastors can be detained as well for the same reason, and even our own American Pastors have been accosted for their biblical views on abortion.

But so far, I have not witnessed a single Christian Leader act under the authority of any government in the world to imprison Christian Pastor's for preaching God's Word.

When that happens, we will indeed find ourselves as in the days of Jeremiah the prophet and Kingdoms will be smashed like pottery thrown violently on cement floors.

So, Pashhur, the High Priest, puts Jeremiah in the Stocks, and after being subsequently released, God sends Jeremiah's lesson today, that Jeremiah, reasonably, is reluctant to give.

Jeremiah knows; he will be portrayed as the laughingstock of the kingdom. People will mimic his preaching with mocking imitations of the way he speaks, and his message from God will simply be rejected again and cause division amongst God's people.

But what we might take to being a simple whining little pastor and even suggest he needs to put on his big boy pants and deal with it, misses what seems to be happening with Jeremiah's inspired and inerrant Word from God.

Jeremiah, and his other book Lamentations, demonstrates that Jeremiah is standing in for God, for what the people think about Jeremiah; is what they think about God!

And if this is what God's people think about God, let the lamenting begin, because a reckoning is indeed coming, and it most likely will be unpleasant for everyone, to say the least!!!

“It's gonna get worse before it gets better.” That is what they tell you in military basic training. And for those of you that have gone through it, you cannot even conceive of how it could be worse, as bad as it is in the moment when they tell you that.

You're already getting up at four in the morning to do muscle failure physical training every day but Sunday. You're already training for 12 hours a day, and by training, I mean pushing yourself as hard as you can trying to memorize your field manual while doing feats of strength and agility that you previously felt was impossible.

But each week passes, and you realize that you are doing everything you did before, but you are adding each week to your routines, *so it does get worse!*

But finally, there comes a moment when the instructors seem more relaxed, and now you are just preparing for final qualifications, and nothing seems to be added anymore, and you have a handle on it.

You're more relaxed. You're ready to go to your unit, you're prepared, you know how to do your job. For a moment in your military life, it is better.

For me, that meant, after both my trainings, just going back to college, and joining my reserve unit there in Lincoln Nebraska, the 5th Training Brigade, smooth sailing from there on out.

But one guy I knew, had to go the division that manned the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on the 38th Parallel right between North and South Korea. He told me when he arrived it was anything but smooth sailing for him.

We all thought we were in the best shape of our lives when we finished training, but for the guys that went; Airborne, Special Forces, Rangers, or the DMZ in Korea, they found out immediately we were in basic shape, not combat shape.

For my buddy, Weed, yup that was really his last name; he told me on his first run with his unit that he was literally clinging to the jersey of the last soldier in the group to keep from falling off the run, the ultimate humiliation for any soldier in the Army, gasping for breath all the way.

I was shocked, because we used to sprint our 3-5 mile runs in Basic and AIT, I'm not sure I could ever run faster than that. Well, I found out, when the enemies' just over the horizon and could shoot at you at any given moment. You can, and you will run faster than you ever thought you could. And even though Weed had a horrible beginning in his combat unit, even though it was worse for a time...it did get better.

The second half of Psalm 30 verse 5 comforts us saying, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

What a lot of people don’t know is what the first half says, “For his anger is but for a moment and his favor is for a lifetime.”

“It all happened so fast.” That’s what I have heard people say when they were in the middle of an earthquake, or a tornado, or a devastating car crash. I have even heard it from people amid shootings, whether it was a police force shoot out or shooting in the street that they just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Before they knew it, it was over, “It all happened so quickly I didn’t realize what was happening until it was over!

I wonder about that with Jesus in the Temple when He showed a side of Jesus none of us are comfortable with.

I do love the meme that says, “When people say, ‘What Would Jesus Do’, we all need to remember that flipping over tables and whipping people with a rope is a possibility.”

But what was that moment like with Jesus? Was it terrifying like the aforementioned examples for the money lenders there? I mean It must have been because they did flee their precious money, maybe they even thought their lives were in danger.

And yet that is not the Jesus we see when the Temple Guard confronts Him on the night in which He was betrayed. He submits to them, and the kangaroo court of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

For these *absolute unrepentant sinners*, weeping indeed tarried the night of Jesus’ Temple rampage, but their joy at eliminating their savior was celebrated that, Easter Eve.

But their celebration was repentant sinners weeping, and even that only tarried for a night, for true joy at hope for redemption revealed itself that Easter Morning.

And it’s helped me to see, that even though God can be terror to evil consciences, He does ultimately love us, and wants to Redeem us from our evil actions, eternally.

Even when God wants us to do, what we don’t want to do like Jeremiah, yes, it’s usually gets worse before it gets better, but it does, always, eventually, get better!

Jesus knew that like no one possibly could. For He walked the way of the cross, taking on the worst pain conceivable, in the worst way probable, through the Cross, to show Himself alive, and eternally better for us.

Indeed, it got worse, but now...is better.

AMEN

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