



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **Another Suffering Servant, Part 4**

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The phrase, “cheap grace” was originally coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who theologically was a neo-orthodox, but on this point he spoke with a clarity the church needed to hear both in his day and in our own. Cheap grace is used in the context of a person who receives the gospel and yet does not act upon it. Bonhoeffer defined it this way:

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian ‘conception’ of God.

An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure the remission of sins... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. (Bonhoeffer, 1959, pp. 45-46)

Cheap grace says, *"I've said the 'magical' words; I'm saved; now leave me alone and let me live the life I want!"* Dr. John MacArthur commenting on this wrote this:

Many professing Christians today utterly ignore the biblical truth that grace 'instruct[s] us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age' (Titus 2:12). Instead, they live as if grace were a supernatural 'Get Out of Jail FREE' ticket- a no-strings-attached, open-ended package of amnesty, beneficence, indulgence, forbearance, charity, leniency, immunity, approval, tolerance, and self-awarded privilege divorced from any moral demands. (MacArthur, 2000)

This is in contrast to how Paul responded to the saving message of Christ! Grace to him was not simply a principle of beneficence, but the compelling drive of his life.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

It is clear from this that Paul was ever mindful that any fruit that could ever be produced in his life was on account of the good pleasure of God (our first point)! Furthermore, he was mindful of the grace of God which enabled him to endure (our second point). But what set Paul apart is that he didn't receive the grace of God passively. Rather, he utilized it for greater good in his own life as well as the Kingdom of God! He acted on it!

This is the third "key" for Jeremiah's endurance! Jeremiah's ministry, which spanned over forty years was fraught with trial and difficulty from the get-go. The duration of his ministry was spent ministering to a rebellious people who did not want to hear the word of the Lord. And though he struggled severely at times, nevertheless he hung in there, running the course, finishing the race, keeping the faith!

How did he do it? How is it that he hung in there when so many, including Jonah, would have run away? The explanation is found in an examination of Jeremiah's life. The first "key" is found in his fleshly response. Jeremiah sported over the course of his ministry eleven ugly and ungodly responses to God. In light of these we concluded that the explanation for Jeremiah's faithfulness was not found in him! Truly, Jeremiah endured because of the preserving grace of God! In the words of Paul:

Romans 14:4, "...[he stood] for the Lord [was] able to make him stand."

In light of this we saw the need and the calling to be men and women who cling to God in faith

place their boast and confidence NOT in themselves, the work of their hands, or any other created thing, BUT in God alone!

This brought us to the second key, the manifold mercies of God. God supplied Jeremiah with the things that tools to fulfill his calling.

- The Promise of Protection and Deliverance, Jeremiah 1:19; 15:20-21.
- The Call to Whole-hearted Trust in God, Jeremiah 9:23-24.
- His Word, Jeremiah 11:1-3a.
- The Revelation/Reaffirmation of God's Awesome, Glorious Character, Jeremiah 10:12-16; 51:15-19; 32:17, 27; 51:57; 48:14-15; 23:23-24; 5:15-18; 18:7-10, 17; 25:17-28; 46-51; 32:21.
- Forewarnings of Difficulty: National (Jeremiah 11:14-17) and Personal (Jeremiah 12:5).
- The Warning to Trust No Man, Jeremiah 12:6.
- The Call of Repentance, Jeremiah 15:19.
- The Moving of the Will, Jeremiah 20:9b.
- The Body of Christ, Jeremiah 26:24; 38:7-9; 39:14.
- Temporal Protection in an Unlikely Package, Jeremiah 38:28; 39:7-10.

It is important to note that God intended these mercies to feed, strengthen, and direct Jeremiah's faith. These mercies were NOT that which enabled Jeremiah to endure for that is attributed to God alone. Accordingly we must not view this list mechanically as if reading the word of God or claiming one of its promises will enable us to endure. Indeed! We live by faith which is fed and nourished by the manifold mercies of God.

### **Delight in the Awesome, Glorious Character of God**

And this brings us to the final "key" to Jeremiah's faithfulness to the Lord: Like Paul, Jeremiah acted upon the mercies of God! First, Jeremiah delighted in the awesome, glorious character of God.

Lamentations 3:55, "I called on Thy name, O Lord, out of the lowest pit."

Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations with the "songs" which gave expression to many of the themes we've already seen in Jeremiah. The first four chapters are acrostic poems, each containing sixty-six lines, except chapter 4, which has forty-four. Chapter 3 is noteworthy because each of the twenty-two Hebrew letters is used for three successive one-line verses. What Jeremiah did with the many revelations that God gave him concerning the Lord's awesome character was to call upon God's name/character! This implies the twofold activity of (1) musing upon that which God had revealed to him and then (2) acting upon it/living in light of it.

Jeremiah 10:6-7, 12-16, "There is none like Thee, O Lord; Thou art great, and great is Thy

name in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Thy due! For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like Thee... 12 *It is* He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens. When He utters His voice, *there is* a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings out the wind from His storehouses. [In contrast] Every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols; for his molten images are deceitful, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of mockery; in the time of their punishment they will perish. The portion of Jacob [which is God] is not like these; for the Maker of all is He, and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; the Lord of hosts is His name."

At many points in Jeremiah's ministry, the Lord revealed to the prophet that He was indeed Almighty God, the Lord of Hosts! Here we read a passage which reflects some thinking on the part of Jeremiah as he contrasted what he and all God's people had in God with the idolater and his idol! The net effect of this passage was to call upon God's people in all places to trust their Living Lord in all things! Jeremiah didn't blindly receive doctrinal statements from God about God; he interacted with them, mulled them over, and then drew necessary conclusions which led him to exhort the nation. The prophet begins with his current struggles:

Lamentations 3:19-23, :, "Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. [Yet] This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. [What? What, Jeremiah, did you call to mind in your affliction that gave you hope? Notice v. 22...] The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. *They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.*"

Jeremiah's "theology" wasn't a cold, academic pursuit. What God revealed to the prophet about Himself became the focus of his meditation! This meditation resulted in Jeremiah looking at God's sovereignty or His faithfulness from different angles! And this resulted in a life genuinely impacted by the character/name of God.

Family of God, is God to you merely an academic pursuit? Or are you still ravished by His grace, love, compassions, goodness, holiness, and greatness?

The story is told of the child whose father was a World War II hero. His class was required to give a report on a famous person in history. Well one of the boy's friends chose the boy's father. This friend gathered quite a bit of information about the man, from the day of his birth and the place, to where he grew up, his military career, his wedding date, his job, children, and the like. A few days later he stood before the class and spoke as if he knew the boy's dad (*with the boy sitting there!*) The son of the WWII hero knew that his classmate did not know his father, he only knew OF his father!

And sadly, this is how many of us approach our divine calling to "know God" (John 17:3). We

think being able to converse on His sovereignty academically or philosophically is the same as “knowing” that He is sovereign! Would you personally today have anything to teach one who has spent a life-time “tasting and seeing that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8)? Do you think if we could bring a departed saint back from paradise that you would have anything to teach them about the Lord? Imagine their view of Christ’s grace, or His goodness, or His omnipotence? Truly, if we could not teach a departed saint anything about Christ that he didn’t already know, it should be obvious that we still have much to learn about our Lord today!

Christian, I hope you see that our theological, dictionary definition of any or all of God’s attributes is far from actually knowing and so walking with Christ. This kind of “knowledge” comes only from walking with the Lord, musing upon His person and work, and so enjoying deep and abiding fellowship with Him. That is what Jeremiah did with the revelation God gave him concerning Himself!

## Reliance Upon God

Jeremiah also relied upon God.

Jeremiah 17:12-14, “A glorious throne on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel [it is clear that Jeremiah spent some time meditating upon God’s throne and the place it ought to hold in the lives of God’s people. This led Jeremiah to this conclusion...], all who forsake Thee will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the Lord. Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for Thou art my praise.”

Perhaps this goes without saying, but when Jeremiah meditated upon God and His glorious attributes, the prophet was moved to action, specifically to hope in God, to rely upon the Lord, to long for everything in his life to result in the praise and glory of God.

Lamentations 3:24-25, “‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I have hope in Him.’ The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.”

Do you see how God’s grace did not prove vain in Jeremiah’s life? Yes he had his struggles at times (as we have seen), but that which God gave to Jeremiah was acted upon! God’s greatness and grace moved the prophet to place his confidence and trust in the Lord! And so he exhorted his generation this way:

Jeremiah 17:7-8, “Blessed [Heb., “to be envied”] is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.”

Clearly Jeremiah's exhortation arose from personal experience! Jeremiah lived confidently in light of the covenant presence of God.

Jeremiah 20:11, "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."

This passage actually was written in the midst of an emotional outburst on the part of Jeremiah after spending time in stocks being publically ridiculed for preaching (cf. Jeremiah 20:2, 7- recall the story of the potter's house and Pashhur). Accordingly, at first glance we might be tempted to dismiss what Jeremiah says here. But that would be a mistake because Jeremiah previous to this had made full use of God's mercies he was able to speak truth to himself as an antidote to the fleshly thoughts which raged in his mind during this time of difficulty! That is what is going on in this passage! In the midst of his suffering and sinful musings, out comes this incredible statement of hope and trust. It reminds me of the words of Dr. D. Martin Lloyd Jones:

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why art thou cast down'— what business have you to be disquieted?

You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope thou in God'— instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. ¶ Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man [Korah (Psalm 42:5)]: 'I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God.' (Lloyd-Jones, 1965, pp. 20-21)

Though Jeremiah for the most part was on the losing side of the war in our text, nevertheless you see evidence that there clearly was a side to Jeremiah that remembered the promises that God gave to him when he was commissioned to the prophetic office.

Jeremiah 1:8, "Do not be afraid of them [the people], for I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord."

This is one of many encouragements (Jeremiah 1:19; 15:20-21) which God gave to Jeremiah to bolster his faith and so enable him to trust the Lord when so much was against him! As a result, what is that Jeremiah did in his life? He called upon and so relied upon the covenant presence of God. And thus we read this:

Lamentations 3:57, "Thou didst draw near when I called on Thee; Thou didst say, 'Do not fear!'"

At the low times in Jeremiah's life, the prophet called on God. Jeremiah knew that the Lord was with him like a "dread champion"! J. A. Thompson put it this way:

Coming in the midst of a passage describing the prophet's depression, this verse has at times been thought to be out of context. But there may be deeper dimensions to be considered. In a psychological and spiritual crisis like Jeremiah's, logic does not always govern a man's thinking; he may be dominated by conflicting convictions. Jeremiah's only resort now is to a rock-bottom affirmation of his faith. *Yahweh is on my side, like a dread warrior.* (Thompson, 1980, p. 461)

Such was Jeremiah's conviction! We are out of time. Next week we'll look at six more examples where Jeremiah acted upon the grace of God!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on December 15, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.