



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 12 Issue 50

December 22, 2013

Another Suffering Servant, Part 5

Many passages of Scripture discuss the importance of godly examples for believers. For example the Hebrew writer exhorts us this way:

Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Paul also gave us his example of what it looks like to serve the Lord as a sinner:

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 [first off notice, he recognized that because of his sin, he didn't deserve any good from God. In other words, he was not in a position to say to God, "You owe me; I deserve better..."]. But by the grace of God I am what I am [secondly, he recognized that God in His sovereignty ordained all that Paul was, is, and would be. Now with that, notice the impact these truths had in Paul's life...], 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 this latter part that sticks out to us. Having been forgiven much Paul responded much to the grace of God and labored more than any of the apostles! In other words, he did not receive God's grace passively. He responded to it actively, passionately, with a heart of commitment and devotion to the Lord!

We see the same response in Jeremiah. This response is the third "key" behind his endurance as a servant of God! Jeremiah's ministry spanned over 40 years and 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. Though he struggled severely at times, nevertheless he hung in there; running the course, finishing the race, keeping the faith!

This raises the question: How did he do it? How is it that he hung in there when so many would have run away? We saw that the first "key" was found in Jeremiah's fleshly response. Recall we considered eleven different ugly and ungodly responses which Jeremiah sported over the course of his ministry. 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, "...[he stood] for the Lord [was] able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4).

In light of this we saw the need and God's calling us to be men and women who cling to God in faith. This means we must place our boast and confidence NOT in ourselves or in the work of our hands, or any other created thing, BUT in God alone!

It is so important that you see this! Miss this point, and everything I say henceforth will sound legalistic to you for the key to endurance is faith in Christ. This is the Christian's lifeblood

The second key to Jeremiah's endurance in ministry was the manifold mercies of God. God supplied Jeremiah with these tools as the prophet endeavored 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 because that is attributed to God alone. Once again, miss this point and you will veer into moralism! 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 in the trial. Indeed! We must live by a faith. This means we must be fed and nourished by the manifold mercies of God.

This brings us to the third “key” to Jeremiah’s faithfulness to the Lord; like Paul, Jeremiah acted upon the mercies of God! So far we have seen three examples:

- Jeremiah Delighted in the Awesome, Glorious Character of God, Jeremiah 10:6-7, 12-16; Jeremiah 17:12-14; 51:15-19; Lamentations 3:19-23, 55.
- He Relied upon God, Jeremiah 11:20; 17:12-14; 20:12; Lamentations 3:24-25.
- He Lived Confidently in Light of the Covenant Presence of God, Jeremiah 20:11; Lamentations 3:57.

Now these ought to put flesh and blood on what living in light of the grace of God looks like. If you were an aspiring concert pianist AND had access to some of the more famous musicians in our day, wouldn’t you pick their brain as to what it takes to endure the hard road to success? Wouldn’t you inquire as to how long they practice? The wherefores and whys of their technique; if it differed from your own? Preferred schools? Courses of study? Now if you followed all their advice, you and I both know you wouldn’t be a concert pianist. Acting like a car doesn’t make you a car! But these words of advice would give meat to your desire as a pianist.

So it is in this third key. Doing what Jeremiah did won’t make you endure- that is only by the grace of God through faith. However, this third key ought to give meat to your desire and so flesh out what it looks like to live by grace! In light of that, let’s consider six more responses of Jeremiah to the grace of God.

Prayer

Jeremiah prayed. In fact he prayed a lot.

Jeremiah 7:16, “As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.”

Jeremiah 11:14 “Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not listen when they call to Me because of their disaster.”

Jeremiah 14:11, “So the Lord said to me, ‘Do not pray for the welfare of this people.’”

J. A. Thompson wrote of this, “It would seem from the passages... that Jeremiah went on praying, since the call to cease praying was repeated.” (Thompson, 1980, p. 284) Truly though at times Jeremiah withdrew as a preacher, served with a poor attitude, ceased to love the nation as God did, and much, much more, nevertheless it is clear that he did not cease praying for them. The significance of this is that prayer, in its most fundamental form, speaks of a Godward look of dependence and devotion. So in a sense, we are back to the second point here.

Yet prayer also brings with it an element of communion, interaction, and so dialoguing with God. Not only did Jeremiah respond to God’s mercies with reliance and dependence, these mercies also stimulated Jeremiah’s relationship with the Lord. God’s mercies brought Jeremiah many times to that place spoken about by David.

Psalm 131:2a, “Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child *rests* against his mother...”

Though God may have instructed Jeremiah not to pray for a particular need that obviously didn’t stop the prophet from seeking to commune/interact with God generally through prayer.

Delighting In God’s Word

Quite naturally, this led to a fifth response that Jeremiah delighted in God’s word.

Jeremiah 15:16, “Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts.”

Jeremiah spoke these words to the Lord in the midst of a prayer that he offered on account of an announcement on the part of God that judgment was coming to the land (vv. 1-14)! And though this judgment was coming, and with it hard and difficult days, listen to the description of what exile meant for God’s people, and also for Jeremiah’s loved-ones as well as Jeremiah:

Lamentations 1:15-16, (Written from the perspective of the nation) “The Lord has rejected all my strong men in my midst; He has called an appointed time against me to crush my young men; the Lord has trodden *as in* a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah. For these things I weep; my eyes run down with water; because far from me is a comforter, one who restores my soul; my children are desolate because the enemy has prevailed.”-

This is what judgment looks like from the perspective of the one judged.

Lamentations 2:11-12 (From Jeremiah’s perspective) “My eyes fail because of tears, my

spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is poured out on the earth, because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, when little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, 'Where is grain and wine?' As they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom."

Any proclamation on the part of Jeremiah of the coming judgment of God would have been a terrifying prospect indeed! Nevertheless would you notice that Jeremiah's delight would NOT be

- In getting his own way.
- Somehow in being delivered or excluded from the suffering.
- In himself being vindicated.

RATHER, his delight, joy, and nourishment would come from feasting on God's word! After eating God's word, Jeremiah said, "Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart!" (Jeremiah 15:16).

Yet there is more to this passage than meets the eye. For the "word" here which Jeremiah "ate" was the revelation of the coming Judgment of God (vv. 1-15). Now haven't we seen that Jeremiah at times fought and struggled with God on account of His judgments? Indeed we have (Jeremiah 4:10; 19ff). Yet get this; when Jeremiah came to understand it, accept it, submit to it, and so preach it, he came to know the joy of the Lord! This is such an important response to the mercies of God! In fact, let us learn from this important elements when it comes to our own personal Bible study. Nourishment in Jeremiah's life took place when he "ate" the word of God. This denotes an activity of at least four things:

- Understanding and so accepting the teaching of God's word.
- Meditating upon and so grappling with the text- "*Lord, what difference ought this to make in my life?*"
- Applying it to his life.
- Using it in the outworking of his call- the purpose of eating is to nourish the body so that it is able to serve.

All of this is included in the expression "Delighting in God's word!"

Truly, Jeremiah did not receive God's grace in vain, he labored hard in the eating the word of God!

He Maintained a Biblical View of Man

Recall that God warned Jeremiah that man was going to hurt him. We see evidence of Jeremiah grappling with this, learning it, and so responding to it in his life. Remember that the first formal attack Jeremiah endured was from his family (Jeremiah 11:18ff). As Jeremiah

worked through this fact, he was brought to this conclusion:

Jeremiah 12:7-8, "I have forsaken My house, I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; she has roared against Me; therefore I have come to hate her."

Jeremiah is NOT talking about his family members per se or any in his community. Rather, he is talking about his home/family as a base of support, encouragement, or protection in life- that is what he meant by his "inheritance." After being beaten up by his own loved ones, Jeremiah was sobered into the conviction that never again place his hope and confidence in man! Again, it reminds me of Christ as Jesus began His public ministry.

John 2:23-25, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man."

Christ knew that great pain would arise from the very people to whom He ministered! Accordingly, He was not deceived by appearances. Mankind, we in this room have a great capacity to betray, hurt, harm, and so consume one another. Accordingly, when God warned Jeremiah concerning the betrayal that awaited him, the prophet obviously heeded the message as he mused and reflected upon the important conviction that when it comes to serving the Lord in a fallen world man ought never be trusted when it comes to:

- Our apprehension of truth (Romans 3:4).
- That on which we rely for ministry (John 2:24-25).
- Our OWN perceptions and motives (Jeremiah 17:9).

We must hold man and ourselves in contempt, trusting ever and only in Christ! This is so important, especially in ministry! Man is going to let you down and in most cases it is going to hurt, severely. How important it is that we heed the warnings of Scripture and so NOT be man-fearers BUT God-fearers! For truly, the Lord will never let you down! In the words of Moses:

Deuteronomy 3:16, "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

Burdened for the Welfare of God's People

Jeremiah was burdened for the welfare of God's people. This seems like a contradiction to the last point, but it is not. We must understand as servants of God that the ones we minister to will hurt us. But we must also understand that the One we serve is not man, but God who calls us to serve man (cf. Romans 1:9)! Accordingly, though we know we are in for pain, nevertheless we are moved by the state of God's people, because our Lord and Savior is (John 21:15).

Jeremiah 9:1, “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”

Jeremiah is genuinely burdened for his countrymen. But again you must see this is part and parcel of ministry. If you are in the business of people- which we are if we are Kingdom Citizens- we are going to be hurt. Jeremiah cried rivers of tears on account of the people of God!

Now that doesn't mean that we look to be wounded as many Christians have done throughout Church History as a means to validate their faith. But if it happens, don't be surprised; keep ministering! Your vindication is NOT the praises of men, BUT the knowledge that God approves of you in Christ!

Seeking for Good in the Midst of Evil

Jeremiah sought for good in the midst of evil when Jeremiah prayed to God concerning how countrymen treated him:

Jeremiah 18:20, “For they have dug a pit for me. [Yet] remember how I stood before Thee to speak good on their behalf, so as to turn away Thy wrath from them.”

This is sort of an elaboration of Paul's call for us in love to seek the best for people (1 Corinthians 13:5, 7). Jeremiah did that as evidenced by his words. As difficult as it was at time, Jeremiah remained faithful to his calling and remained engaged in the work of the Lord.

Remaining Faithful to his Calling and so Engaged in the Work of the Lord

Jeremiah 17:16, “But as for me, I have not hurried away from *being* a shepherd after Thee, nor have I longed for the woeful day; Thou Thyself knowest the utterance of my lips was in Thy presence.”

Though many times Jeremiah did have his struggles with serving the Lord (cf. Jeremiah 20:8-9), nevertheless the bent of his life over forty-five years was one of consistency and faithfulness in the execution of his calling. And so in Jeremiah 20:3-6 after Pashhur the priest attacked Jeremiah and placed him in stocks, though Jeremiah would have his moments of struggle (vv. 8-18), nevertheless he went right on proclaiming the word of the Lord (21:3ff). In other words, he was the “son” who said, “No!” when his father sent him into the fields, but then afterwards he went (Matthew 21:30).

In Jeremiah 38:17-18 after Jeremiah went from a cistern to a prison, back to a cistern and again to a prison, through it all he did not shrink back from fulfilling the Lord's call on his life even though at times he personally struggled.

Proverbs 24:16, “For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked

stumble in *time of calamity.*”

Yes, at times, we are going to have our set-backs, but the man that endures is the one who in faith (again, we are back on our first point) gets back up and applies himself yet once more to the calling that God has placed on their life.

This is an important principle especially in a Baalistic culture which places so much emphasis on how we feel. Today, how one feels is the basis upon which we choose our associates, our jobs, our spouses, our schooling, and much, much more today. If we remove the feeling and the job, the friend, the spouse, the class is in jeopardy!

Now when this is applied to ministry you will have a group of people who, when the feelings wane, the ministry will stop:

- *I used to attend those gatherings...*
- *I used to invest in other people...*
- *I used to have people over...*
- *I used to read my Bible...*
- *I used to pray...*
- *I used to attend church regularly...*
- *But when the road got hard, I gave up! Ministry is not supposed to be that way!*

Christian, ministry is a hard, long, and at times a rough road. We must not shrink back, but if we do, lick your wounds for a little bit, and then with a renewed trust in Christ, get back in the game!

Bibliography

Thompson, J. A. (1980). *A Book of Jeremiah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing CO.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on December 22, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.