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Another Suffering Servant, Part 3

Many of us can remember our first year in college and how it didn't go so well. Most of us didn't know the first thing about studying. Furthermore, many of us got involved in things which required many hours away from school with practice and meetings. And many of us found out that we really weren't too good at (you choose) chemistry, English, Spanish, accounting, or economics. To make matters worse, I injured my neck the first week of practice which resulted in having to wear a neck brace for two months; this made my drafting class incredibly difficult. And in my first semester in college I learned I wasn't a very good chemist!

The net result is that many of us struggled, and many of us did so privately. Many of us thought that obviously everyone else in school was brilliant; and that we were the only fraud. Yet most all of us learned that we weren't alone in our struggles. It was then that we discovered the fellowship of other students!

Family of God, when you were brought into the family of God you were made a member of a fellowship of believers each of whom have struggled to serve the Lord just like you! And though the vast majority of the members of this fellowship are now in glory, nevertheless some still speak though they are dead!

Hebrews 11:4, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."

Indeed, the testimony and witness of Abel's life are still being used by God to encourage the body of Christ today! That is the case when it comes to Jeremiah! He shows us that we are not alone in our struggle to serve Christ! Jeremiah struggled like all of us with

- Christlikeness.
- Serving with a good attitude.
- Ministering to a thankless people.
- Wondering if anything you are doing is meaningful.

Yet Jeremiah served Christ for well over forty years! And though he had his setbacks, nevertheless the testimony of his life is that he kept the faith! In light of this AND in knowing as we do the horror that God brought Jeremiah through as a servant of Christ, we are quite interested in knowing how this prophet endured. What were the elements/the keys which enabled Jeremiah to hang in there when so much was against him?

The first element or key we saw was in Jeremiah's fleshly response and the preserving grace of God. There is no question that Jeremiah was a sinner who, with Paul (cf. Romans 7:14-24), struggled to respond in a Christ-like manner to the many trials and persecutions he underwent as a prophet. The first "key" to Jeremiah's faithfulness as a servant of Christ had nothing to do with Jeremiah and everything to do with the preserving grace of God!

Ecclesiastes 9:11b, "...the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability..."

The battle, including its outcome, belongs to the Lord! It was the Lord's good pleasure which made Jeremiah what he was. And this was Paul's testimony.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10a, "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...”

No doubt this is why Paul was so confident when it came to others in Christ; Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Philippians 1:6, “*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

Romans 14:4, “...and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

And so when we inquire as to the secret of Jeremiah’s endurance over the course of a life-time of difficulty, we discover that it had nothing to do with Jeremiah and everything to do with God! In light of this, what sort of people ought we to be as we endeavor to serve Christ? We ought to be ones wholly reliant/dependent upon God! Listen to Asaph as he interacted with our first point:

Psalm 73:25-26, 28, “Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail [as a servant, Asaph knew he would let God down], but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever... [as a result, notice his passion...] the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge...”

Truly, if ministry is to be carried out by broken vessels like Jeremiah (who denied the Lord many times in his life), Peter (who likewise denied the Lord), David, Paul, Mark, the Apostles, AND you and me (all of whom denied the Lord many times in their lives), what sort of people ought we to be? We must be wholly dependent upon the Lord!

The second element or “key” is found in God’s manifold mercies. Each of the following served to feed, strengthen, or direct Jeremiah in his faith! Again, they weren’t the reason Jeremiah endured (God alone gets the credit for that). But they are that which God used to enable the prophet to endure!

The Promise of Protection and Deliverance

The culmination of Jeremiah’s call to the prophetic ministry ended with this promise:

Jeremiah 1:19, “‘And they [the people of God] will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,’ declares the Lord.”

Throughout this book, this promise is repeated (Jeremiah 1:8, 19; 15:15; 20:11, 13; 39:11-12).

Jeremiah 15:20-21, “‘Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you; for I am with you to save you and deliver you,’ declares the Lord. ‘So I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I

will redeem you from the grasp of the violent.”

If a man gave such a promise to you, you would have cause to doubt. But this is the Lord, God! Accordingly, regardless of how it may have seemed in Jeremiah’s life, we know the Lord was always with him; at no time was the prophet on his own! This is an incredible promise and assurance! It is a promise which we too have received in Christ! After sending us out to serve the Lord in a world that likewise will not receive us well, Christ gave this promise:

Matthew 28:20, “...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The Call to Whole-hearted Trust in God

And yet this promise is meaningless unless we act upon it. Therefore, in this prophecy God gave another mercy which amounted to a call to whole-hearted trust in God.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.”

We have considered the word for “boast” before. It speaks of the fundamental basis/ground upon which a man or a woman stands before God and man. For example, for some their boast is in their:

- Wisdom — it is in this they delight and it is on account of this they want the world to know about them. For others it is their
- Might — look how accomplished they are at what they do! See how well they play the piano, write the paper, push the extremes of their physical limitations. This is their glory and joy! Still others it is their
- Wealth — I’m a cut above most! Look at my house, my cars, my clothing. Look how I comport myself amongst man!

The call that God gave to His people as well as to Jeremiah, was that their boast, delight, joy, and glory in life is God, both His person and His work! In other words, this passage is an exhortation for us to live vicariously through Him! It was to this that God invited the nation and the prophet!

God’s Word

The third mercy given to Jeremiah was God’s word.

Jeremiah 11:1-3a, “The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ‘Hear [understand, observe, obey] the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say to them...’”

This verse stands out on the page! Before Jeremiah was to proclaim to the people of God the covenant which God had established with the nation, God first exhorted him to submit to the message himself! God said, “[Jeremiah], hear the words of this covenant, and [then] speak to the men of Judah.” Ezra years later wrote virtually the same thing:

Ezra 7:10, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

It was a Moses exhorted the people of God:

Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things [concerning the future] belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”

As a prophet of the Lord, Jeremiah had to see that the revelation which God gave to the nation through him was as much for him as it was the nation! This is a glorious truth! God has not left us alone to sojourn aimlessly in this land. He has given us His word which ought to be our greatest, most cherished possession. David said that the word of God to the Christian is:

Psalms 19:10, “...more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.”

In fact, if we had to choose between the word of God and a miracle, we must choose the word every time. Peter in his reflection upon the Mount of Transfiguration and the cloud that personally witnessing this gave to him in the early church said this:

2 Peter 1:18-19, “And we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And [yet] we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place...”

We must not endeavor to base our faith upon a miracle, supernatural event or personal experience because we have something more sure than a miracle, the very word of God! This is such a gift and blessing! God has given His word as a mercy to the servants of Christ! This truly was one of the mercies God gave Jeremiah that he might endure!

The Revelation/Reaffirmation of God’s Awesome, Glorious Character

Speaking of this word, the fourth mercy the Lord gave to Jeremiah was the revelation and affirmation of His awesome, glorious character in the attributes of God:

- Creator

Jeremiah 10:12-16, “*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. 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 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.*”

- Omnipotent

Jeremiah 32:17, “Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee.”

- A Mighty Warrior, Jeremiah 48:14-15.
- Omnipresent, Jeremiah 23:23-24.
- THE Lord of the Nations, Jeremiah 5:15-18; 18:7-10, 17; 25:17-28; 46-51.
- A Sovereign Deliverer, Jeremiah 32:21.

Jeremiah 32:21, “And Thou didst bring Thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and with wonders, and with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror.”

There are many more characteristics which the Lord manifested to Jeremiah about Himself in this book. All of these are intended by God to be a source of strength and encouragement to Jeremiah and us as we endeavor to serve the Lord! Now you need to realize that we here have stumbled upon something big when it comes to our walks, and that is the bigness of God! An understanding of the greatness of God is crucial to Christianity! Listen to how Paul summarized the message he preached as an Apostle:

2 Corinthians 4:5-6, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord [the sovereign one], and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. [You want to know the essence of the message Paul preached to the nations? It simply was and is, “God is Big! Awesome! Glorious!” In fact, Paul continued...] For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

It is the manifestation of the greatness of God which brings a person to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Truly, a knowledge of the greatness of God is a mercy which the Lord gives His children as servants of His will. And it was this that God frequently entrusted to Jeremiah as the prophet engaged in ministry!

Christian, what problem are you facing today that is bigger than God? Then why are you so burdened? John Piper referencing the gift that is ours in understanding the "Bigness of God" wrote this:

Our fatal error is believing that wanting to be happy means wanting to be made much of. It feels so good to be affirmed. But the good feeling is finally rooted in the worth of self, not the worth of God. This path to happiness is an illusion.

And there are clues. One is that no one goes to the Grand Canyon or to the Rockies to increase his self-esteem. That is not what happens in front of massive deeps and majestic heights. But we do go there for joy. So there is a witness in us that soul-health and great happiness come not from beholding a great self, but a great splendor.

The Bible teaches that the final ground of our joy is seeing and savoring the personal greatness of God in Christ. Consider Jesus' strange love in letting Lazarus die. According to John 11:1-6 Jesus' friend, Lazarus, had a terminal illness. His sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." To this Jesus says, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." In other words, Jesus takes the sisters' focus on love ("he whom you love") and orients it on the glory of God.

Then John says something almost incomprehensible: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was." In other words, precisely because He loved him (see the word so) He let him die. How is this love? Jesus already answered that: In letting him die he and his sisters will see the glory of God. Seeing the glory of God is a greater gift of love than life.

Our fatal error is believing that wanting to be happy means wanting to be made much of. It feels so good to be affirmed. But the good feeling is finally rooted in the worth of self, not the worth of God. This path to happiness is an illusion. And there are clues. One is that no one goes to the Grand Canyon or to the Rockies to increase his self-esteem. That is not what happens in front of massive deeps and majestic heights. But we do go there for joy. So there is a witness in us that soul-health and great happiness come not from beholding a great self, but a great splendor. (Piper, 2001)

That was the fourth mercy God gave to Jeremiah: the revelation that Jeremiah was in the service of a great and glorious God! No problem he could ever encounter was bigger than the Lord! Accordingly, Jeremiah was engaged in a ministry whose fruit was both determined and

guaranteed by the Lord! And so are you!

Forewarnings of Difficulty: National and Personal

On the national scene God said this:

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.”

If you read further (and throughout this book) you will discover that on multiple occasions God warned the prophet that things were not going to get better for the nation! Jeremiah needed to know this in his ministry lest he grew tired or disillusioned on account of a lack of fruit. Yet, he also needed to know that it wouldn't get any better for him personally as well. God gave this warning to Jeremiah right after he was attacked by his own family:

Jeremiah 12:5, “If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out [his own family (Jeremiah 11:21)], then how can you compete with horses? [like when Jerusalem was attacked by the false prophets or held in siege by the Babylonians] If you fall down in a land of peace [again, referencing the treatment he received from his family], how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan [which was renowned for wild animals like lions and bears- an allusion to the Babylonians]?”

In essence as a mercy to Jeremiah, the Lord warned him that the little suffering he had endured from his family to date was nothing compared to what was about to come upon him and the nation. Now if you say, “*That wouldn't encourage me, but discourage me!*” you would be wrong. For isn't that what Christ does in His word? He warns us that things are going to be tough so that when trial comes, we know God is still on the throne; this too is part of His plan!

John 13:19, “From now on I am telling you before *it* comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *He*.”

After detailing the trails and difficulties we can expect as Christians (cf. John 15:18ff), Christ said this:

John 16:1-4a, “These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them...”

When hard times come we must know that each trial is according to sovereign will of a good God! And so rather than kick against the goads, we can in fact delight ourselves in the Lord! That was Jeremiah's calling and privilege! As such, he needed never to be shocked by trial or

difficulty!

The Warning to Trust No Man

Continuing with the context of the persecution Jeremiah received from his family, God warned the prophet thus:

Jeremiah 12:6, "For even your brothers and the household of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you, even they have cried aloud after you. Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you."

This passage is of the same category as John 2:

John 2:23-25, "Now when [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. [Jesus got a little following of faithful men! He now could let His guard down knowing that these few had his back! Right?...] 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."

What Christ acted upon here is the message God intended for Jeremiah! *My dear servant, know that every man with whom you minister has the potential of hurting you (your spouse, your children, your parents, your friends). Accordingly, make Me/God your portion and strength!*

The Call of Repentance

After Jeremiah accused God of being a "deceptive stream" (v. 18)- unreliable/unfaithful, the Lord told Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 15:19, "If you return, then I will restore you- before Me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, but as for you, you must not turn to them."

What an incredible mercy given to Jeremiah; the gift of repentance! Recall that Jeremiah here was guilty of NO small sin. He pretty well let God have it. Yet God did not cast him out or curse him. Rather, the Lord calls him to repentance. Family of God this is an important mercy to remember as we serve the Lord. Man at his best at best is a man and so is going to sin. Yet we need to remember that God is always willing to forgive. In fact, the mercy here is offered to Jeremiah in the midst of his sinning! Christian, avail yourself of this mercy each and every day!

The Moving of the Will

Jeremiah 20:8-9, “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*.”

Regardless of what you might conclude from this about the call of ministry, notice that when Jeremiah withdrew from the service of God’s kingdom, the Lord prompted him, moved him, and so would not allow him to withdraw. It was on account of this mercy that Farrell was able to curse Calvin’s intent to go to Strasbourg for private study rather than minister in Geneva. Calvin wasn’t superstitious; rather he knew what would happen if he did not use the gifts and abilities the Lord gave him to serve the body! That is what was going on with Jeremiah! Disobedient Christians are miserable people! Accordingly, God used this misery in Jeremiah’s life to burden him unto service!

The Body of Christ

On three separate occasions at least Jeremiah was protected by genuine servants of Christ. Truly Christ’s body, the fellowship of the brethren, is a mercy God gives us!

Temporal Protection in an Unlikely Package

Following his release from the muddy cistern, Jeremiah was placed in the King’s prison, and we are told about it with these words:

Jeremiah 38:28, “So Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guardhouse until the day that Jerusalem was captured.”

While indeed Jeremiah was placed in a prison and no doubt struggled with the reasons why, nevertheless you must see that in God’s providence being labeled “a criminal of the state” made him a friend of the Babylonians! Do you understand that? God deigned to protect and preserve Jeremiah via a prison! In fact, notice the fate of those NOT in prison when the end came:

Jeremiah 39:7-9, 11-12, “[Nebuchadnezzar] then blinded Zedekiah’s eyes and bound him in fetters of bronze to bring him to Babylon. The Chaldeans also burned with fire the king’s palace and the houses of the people, and they broke down the walls of Jerusalem. And as for the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had gone over to him and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard carried *them* into exile in Babylon [which we know was a brutal journey with much suffering and death. And yet in contrast, notice]... Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, saying, ‘Take him and look after him, and do nothing harmful to him; but rather deal with him just as he tells you.’”

There is no question at the time of Jeremiah's imprisonment if we were Jeremiah we would have thought that God was somehow doing His servant wrong! *Why the chains, Lord?* Yet the chains were used by God to protect and ultimately deliver Jeremiah! In fact, this same theme is seen in God's treatment of Joseph and Paul! Speaking of the latter, Paul always wanted to go to Rome and minister; yet as an outcast Jew he would not have had much ability to reach the wealthy and powerful with the message of Christ. That is a given! Yet when God brought him to Rome as a prisoner, Paul was chained to the only guards allowed in the city limits, the Praetorium guard (Caesar's personal body guards). As a result, these guards heard the gospel and shared what they heard with Caesar's household such that many came to know the Lord (Philippians 4:22)! What and what only made this possible? Paul's chains!

We must always understand that what the world may mean for evil, God will always mean for good (Genesis 50:20)!

Family of God, read this book and you will discover many more mercies which God gave to Jeremiah that the prophet might be able to endure a lifetime of difficulty, trial, and strife. We have considered ten of them! Now in light of these ten, I have a question for you: How is it that Jeremiah's contemporaries knew all of what we have seen, as also did the Jews of Christ's day, and yet it did not profit them? And secondly, how is it that YOU know and could have articulated these ten graces, and yet you also struggle at times like Jeremiah in your walk?

Hebrews 4:2, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."

From this we see that knowledge alone does not make a servant of God. In fact, we know that the demons in hell have better theology than most Christians (James 2:19). So what is it that makes what we have seen effectual in our lives as a vehicle of endurance? How was it was an encouragement to Jeremiah? The mercies of God in this text had to be received by faith/reliance/dependence upon God!

Does this sound familiar? With this we are brought back to the first "key" to Jeremiah's endurance: The Preserving Grace of God by which the servant lives in humble reliance upon the righteousness of Christ and so cultivates an unconditional trust in God! When these two mercies are united in a believer, they persevere unto the end!

Bibliography

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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.

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About the Preacher

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