

JEREMIAH 20

PUBLIC PERSECUTION FROM PASHUR

At the close of the last chapter, we found Jeremiah returning from the Valley of Hinnom and standing in the court of the Temple. At that very moment, crowds of people were very likely engaged in their sacred ceremonies. And when the prophet began to make his voice heard, a vast concourse must have gathered. Their angry faces and vehement gestures indicated the intensity of their dislike for the man who cast the shadow of impending destruction over their happiest hours. How could they continue to endure all of his sermons? Was the prophet to be forever permitted to utter such withering words without being punished? When a community or a nation has plunged into the depths of sin, reproof becomes irksome; and the reprover becomes the object of abhorrence and hate.

Could Jeremiah be allowed to say such distasteful words of doom, without being punished for “disturbing the peace”? Well, the endurance of at least one man in the prophet’s audience had finally reached its limits. His name was Pashur, and he was the chief governor of the Temple at this time. After Jeremiah had finished his public address in the Temple-court, Pashur seized him, struck him, thrust him into the stocks, and left him there the whole night – exposed to the cold night, to any prowling animals, and to the ridicule of the people.

In the morning, Pashur appears to have had some kind of remorse for his harsh treatment; for he came to release the prophet, whose strong spirit was not cowed – not even for a moment – by the indignity and torture to which he had been exposed. Turning on his persecutor, Jeremiah told him that he would live to be a terror to himself and to all his friends. In fact, Pashur would have a new name given to him by the Lord – “Magor-missabib,” which means “terror round about,” or “fear on every side.” Jeremiah said that all the land of Judah would be given into the hand of the king of Babylon; and that the people would be carried captives to Babylon, and slain there with the sword.

Being set free, Jeremiah went to his home; and there he poured forth that marvelous combination of heroic faith and wailing grief which is here recorded for us in verses 7-18, so that we may know the weakness of his nature. Here we see just how earthen this vessel was, into which God had placed His heavenly treasure. He was no brazen wall, but a reed shaken by the wind; he was not a wise and mighty hero, but a little child. The great things that he said and did when he was brought face-to-face with the sins of his times were not due to any strength or heroism that was inherent in himself. “There is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones,” he said. “I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain” (verse 9). “O Lord, thou art stronger than I, and hast pre-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Pashur publicly persecutes Jeremiah in the court of the Temple – verses 1-2
- ❖ Jeremiah predicts the doom of Pashur and the people of Judah – verses 3-6
- ❖ He pours out a combination of heroic faith and wailing grief – verses 7-18



vailed” (verse 7). This burning fire in the prophet’s bones causes us to think back to the days of steam-powered boats. There used to be a little steamboat that carried tourists close to the foot of Niagara Falls, called the *Maid of the Mist*. This journey required her to slowly make headway upstream against the mad rush of waters, defying their attempt to push her back. She would calmly and serenely pursue her onward course without being turned aside, driven back, or dismayed. And why? Because there was a burning fire that was shut up within her heart; her engines could not stop, because they were impelled by the strong and regular heat of the boilers. Similarly, within Jeremiah’s heart, a fire had been lit from the heart of God; and it was kept aflame by the continual fuel of Divine strength that was poured upon it. Therefore, his difficulty was not in speaking, but in keeping silent; it was not in acting, but in refraining.

Jeremiah’s nature reminds us of an Aeolian harp. It is so sensitive to the passing breeze that it wails with sorrow one moment, but it is jubilant with song the next. It is so delicately strung, so sympathetic, and so easily affected by every passing circumstance; and so was the soul of the prophet. This whole Book mirrors the changefulness of his mood, and there are many examples of this in this chapter. But is it right for any person to utter such complaints as Jeremiah did in this chapter? Is it proper for anyone to wish that he had never been born, or that he might die at once? Doubtless, through impatience, Jeremiah did err in some of his sentiments – as did Job, Elijah, Jonah, and many other children of God. However, Jeremiah’s thoughts were a reflex of his human feelings; and persons like him frequently experience temptations to despondency, to which people of more buoyant spirits are almost entirely strangers. But let no one yield to despondency! Yes, there are indeed times of spiritual depression. So what is the solution? The only remedies are faith and hope – faith which rests upon the promises of the Most High, and hope which looks forward to the dawning of a brighter day! Such a day will surely dawn. We may rely with confidence upon the unalterable I AM, Who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Jeremiah’s words and emotions are a source of instruction and comfort to us. From them, we should learn the full weight of the temptation, so that we may arm ourselves with prayer as a weapon against the power of the tempter. And we should also see the greatness of God’s grace, which raises again those who are stumbling! He does not let His servants succumb under the temptation. The Lord does not cast off His servants; but rather, He gives them the needed strength for carrying on the heavy labors of their offices. Even Jeremiah was eventually raised by the Lord out of these temptations; for as we shall hereafter see, he endured greater trials than these without uttering a word of complaint.

O Lord Jesus, set our hearts on fire for You, so that we may not be daunted by any persecution or opposition, or abashed by any fear of what men may do to us! Amen.