

Lessons of a Hard Ministry (Jeremiah 20:1–18)

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Introduction

Tomorrow, Memorial Day, will celebrate the 30th anniversary of our move to Lamar in 1990 to assume the pastorate of Calvary Baptist Church. God called me here to minister to His people, to love them, and to teach the Word of God. My confidence rested in a sovereign, all-powerful God as revealed in the Word of God.

What has this to do with Jeremiah 20 *today*? I identify with Job and Jeremiah in waiting for God to vindicate them in their trials.

Job seems to have had a nagging suspicion that God could not be trusted. Thus, he grappled with His hard providence and begged for an intercessor to explain his case. Instead, the Lord simply revealed His greatness and goodness, which was enough to correct Job's thinking. Jeremiah, unlike Job, had a clear understanding of where his ministry would take him; yet he resigned reluctantly to suffering but in full confidence of God's ultimate goodness.

The subject of the passage is the seeming unjustified suffering of the faithful. Jeremiah 20 can be divided into three sections: (1) His powerful *confrontation* of Pashhur (vv. 1–6), (2) His broken *lamentation* over Judah's sin (vv. 7–13), (3) His anguished *resignation* to suffering (vv. 14–18)

I. Confrontation

1. Pashhur's fate uttered by the prophet (vv. 1, 2)
 - a. Pashhur was a bureaucrat in Judah, a priest and a chief officer in the Lord's house.
 - b. He heard the message of God at the Potsherd Gate (19:1, 2) and denied the truth proclaimed.
 - c. His response was to persecute the prophet by having him beaten and put in stocks overnight. How would this persecution prevent the disaster God pronounced on Judah?
2. The Lord's indictment of Pashhur (vv. 4–6)
 - a. A name change: *Pashhur* (freedom) becomes *Magor-missabib* (terror-on-every-side, v. 3)
 - 1) Pashhur was a typical bureaucrat more concerned with his position than the truth or his relationship with God.
 - 2) The God of Judah was about to destroy his self-confidence and reduce him to a sniveling rat, living in a dwelling place of terror.
 - b. Pashhur's fate pronounced by the prophet
 - 1) As this *priest* made himself a terror to God's servant, God was about to make him a terror to himself and his friends (v. 4).
 - 2) The wealth and prized treasures of the city would be taken to Babylon, implying that these, not the Lord, were Pashhur's real passion.
 - 3) *Freedom* became *captive* in Babylon (v. 6).
 - 4) Pashhur, the priest, was a false prophet to boot.

II. Lamentation

1. The prophet's response to his humiliation (v. 7)

a. Did Jeremiah really believe that God *deceived* him? This is hard language that the commentators have difficulty explaining. Their tendency is to soften the language by translating *deceive* as “entice” or “persuade.” In my opinion the statement is a sarcastic reflection of the views of his persecutors, not Jeremiah’s (see v. 10).

b. The Lord previously informed the prophet of the trouble he faced:

2. Jeremiah’s complaint (vv. 8–10)

Hard providence produces a sense of isolation in a believer’s life. Nevertheless, God is just and that He will act with integrity, which assures the believer so that he has no hesitation in sharing his deepest feelings with God.

- a. The Word of God Jeremiah preached was a word of judgment and, thus, did not produce happy results for the prophet (v. 8).
- b. That same Word prevented the prophet from quitting his responsibility, which would be his natural tendency (v. 9).
- c. The audience’s response to the word was angry revenge on the messenger (v. 10; denounce, ensnare, and deceive him).

3. Jeremiah’s *consolation*—the Lord (vv. 11–13)

- a. A statement of faith (v. 11, 9:23–26)
- b. A prayer of faith (v. 12)
- c. A song of praise (v. 13)

III. Resignation

The final section is a lament reflecting the misery of Job (vv. 4–18; Job 3:3–10).

Jeremiah used an ancient form to express misery. It is not sinful complaining, but a recognition that, due to hard providence, he will suffer along with the people God was judging. Jeremiah naturally cringed at the pain his suffering would bring him (v. 18).

What Can We Conclude?

The believer’s joy does not come as a result God’s goodness but in knowing the Lord. It is knowing the Lord that sustains the believer in the time of suffering and pain. That God is gracious, just, and good enables one to accept trials, knowing that this life is but a vapor soon passing away. God is preparing His own for eternity, not just the present.

There are four things that the Lord used in my life through these thirty years.

- 1) The Lord drove me to *His Word* to seek refuge in Him there through His promises.
- 2) The Lord forced me to seek *His face* continually in His Word for guidance and direction.
- 3) The Lord enabled me to know *His person* and character as revealed in the Word.
- 4) The Lord enabled prayer and self-examination because of *His will* revealed in the Word.

Through the promises of His Word, the Lord encouraged me that all wrongs will be made right when He vindicates His servants. If not in this lifetime, as Job, certainly in the eternal kingdom, as Jeremiah.