

Frustration and Faith (John 15:17–16:4)

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Introduction

Disappointments arise when expectations are not realized. Everyone has disappointments because life is uncertain. When unrealized expectations mount up, *discouragement* ensues. Discouragement may lead to tragic consequences. This danger can be avoided by learning to walk by faith, not by sight, as Paul testified: “*We walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage*” (2 Corinthians 5:7, 8).

Faith is a gift of God, but it comes through *hearing* the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Hebrews 11 documents the Hall of Faith because it documents the faith of many biblical saints, closing with a short list of others “*who through faith conquered kingdoms*” (Hebrews 11:33, 34). However, the testimony of faith of some, “*though commended through their faith,*” did not receive what was promised. These faithful saints suffered, being destitute, afflicted, and mistreated (vv. 36–38).

Most modern believers would be frustrated by such adversity. The expectation of suffering and persecution does not fit their imagined scenario of Christianity. When expectations are not realized, they become discouraged (Hebrews 12:12, 13). Failing to obtain the grace of God has three consequences: (1) some may develop a *root of bitterness* that causes trouble, whereby “*many become defiled*”; or (2) some may fall into *immorality*; or (3) some may become *unholy*—adopt the profane or common lifestyle, like Esau, who sold away his spiritual privilege (his birthright) with its eternal value for a bowl of chili to satisfy a temporal need.

Jesus informed the disciples of the suffering they should expect because of their relationship to Him. What Jesus taught them should prevent personal disaster. “*I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away*” (16:1).

Modern believers also face the hardships Jesus announced. These hardships are the consequences of living a godly life in a God-hating world. Two truths must be understood for believers to walk by faith and to faithfully to live out the will of God: (1) believers must understand that, although they are citizens of the kingdom of God, they are *exiles* in a hostile land until they are called safely home, and (2) God does not promise a prosperous and easy life in this exile.

I. Living the Kingdom of God in the Kingdom of Darkness

1. Believers are in the world but not of the world (John 15:19). As noted last week, Jesus was planning to leave the world to return to the Father (John 17:14–17). Peter wrote to the saints in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. He called them “*elect exiles of the Dispersion*” (1 Peter 1:1). God’s exiles are not to live like the citizens of the country in which they live. Rather, they are to live holy lives, having been “*called out of darkness into his marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9; Matthew 5:13, 14). Peter addressed the issue of unjust suffering (1 Peter 2:11; 4:1, 2).
2. Scripture is filled with examples of God’s servants in exile who were used of God to accomplish His will. David, for example, was used of God while he was in exile to fight against the enemies of Israel. David did more to further the conquest of the Promised Land than anyone since Joshua (1 Samuel 27:11).

Daniel resolved not compromise his relationship with God while an exile in Babylon (Daniel 1:8). Therefore, the Lord “*gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs*” (v. 9). The resolve and obedience of Daniel was rewarded with God’s giving him and his companions unbelievable favor with the king of Babylon (Daniel 1:19–21).

God used Daniel greatly and gave him wonderful information about the future. But that is not always the case for exiles. For example, Esther found herself in real danger, yet she resolved to help the Jews to resist the plot of Haman to destroy them. She would go to the king, which was forbidden, and “*If I perish, I perish*” (Esther 4:16).

3. Following in the train of these godly saints, Jesus has called His followers to live uncompromising, holy, and obedient lives in this ungodly age because Jesus is Lord (Daniel 7:14). His dominion is everlasting, and His kingdom shall never pass away. His own are to live for Christ, having the Holy Spirit in them to “*bear witness about Him*” (John 15:27; 16:33; 1 John 5:4, 5). However, all His own are human creatures with faults and often false expectations, which can leave them frustrated. Such was the case of Jeremiah.

II. The Frustration of a Faithful Prophet

1. The prophet Jeremiah had expectations, and the background of his frustration is found in the first verses of Jeremiah 20. Pashhur the priest had Jeremiah beaten and bound in stocks in the Benjamin Gate near the temple. The Jews refused to hear and heed the message that, unless they repented, God was about to send them into captivity in Babylon.

Pashhur had falsely prophesied a message that contradicted Jeremiah’s. Sadly, the people convinced themselves that God had to keep His promise despite their disobedience and sin. Jeremiah told them the truth from God and warned them that turning away from God would bring them under His wrath. They rejected the prophet and his message.
2. At this point in the narrative, Jeremiah’s expectations were shattered, and he uttered a psalm of lament (vv. 7–18). This lament contains three parts:
 - a. First, Jeremiah stated his disappointment (vv. 7, 8). Jeremiah obeyed God and faithfully proclaimed His message. The result was that he was made a *laughingstock*—one to be mocked and held in derision. Nevertheless, Jeremiah was assured of Yahweh’s support (1:17–19). This is very similar to the instruction Paul gave to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 16:13).
 - b. Second, Jeremiah quickly realized his predicament (v. 9). The Word of God was doing its powerful work in Jeremiah. He was compelled to preach the Word, even when it meant opposition. Jeremiah learned the greatness and power of the Word (15:16; 23:29).
 - c. Finally, Jeremiah remembered to walk by faith, even when he could not see (Jeremiah 20:7–13).

Conclusion

Yes, Jeremiah became frustrated with his condition and even lamented the day of his birth (vv. 14–18). But he trusted the Lord, even in his dark hour. Hear what he recorded in Lamentations 3:19–25).

The disciples and all who follow Christ must learn as Jeremiah to walk by faith in their exile. They must learn to put their expectations away and trust God, even when they do not understand. Finally, and most important, they must make the Lord their portion.