

Jeremiah's Complaint Jeremiah 12 (ESV)

Introduction

- When was the last time you complained?
 - It's kind of a rhetorical question.
 - It's too cold this morning.
 - Sister So&So is sitting in my seat. Doesn't she know I sit there every Sunday?
 - Oh, here goes the pastor again. Hope he is done soon!
 - We complain when other people complain, only because we really like to be the one who does all the complaining!
- Sermon Series, "Persevering in a Time of Uncertainty"
 - Prophet Jeremiah
 - Referred to as "the weeping prophet," however it is his perseverance that tells the real story.
 - Two visions of uncertainty
 - Despite the uncertainty, Jeremiah has to stay focused on his call in order to persevere
 - Things come to a blow in chapters 11-12
 - Jeremiah has been faithful to proclaim the message God has given him
 - The rebuke of the people is taking a toll on Jeremiah
 - Jeremiah begins to complain to God,, "It's not fair that I'm doing what you have asked me to do, yet it is the people who prosper while I suffer."
 - This is the part of Jeremiah that I think we can all relate.
 - God's not fair! Why do things work out for someone else, but not for me?
 - God loves us all the same, but Jeremiah had to understand something that all of us have to understand: How God works in our life, is dependent upon our calling.

Sometimes the Wicked Prosper, While the Righteous Suffer

- **Jeremiah 12:1**
 - God's Righteousness doesn't seem to match the prosperity of the Wicked
 - Here is the Unexpected; when God doesn't act as we think he should act!!!
 - Is it possible that Jeremiah has taken God's promises for granted?
 - In other words, because God called Jeremiah, then he should not endure hardships.
 - What was God's promise?
 - "I am watching over my word to perform it." (**Jeremiah 1:12**)
 - "They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you." (**Jeremiah 1:19**)

- Remember from last week, in times of uncertainty one thing is always certain; God's Word is True
 - Jeremiah's calling was not based on the response of the people, but on the Word of God.
 - Jeremiah's calling is not unique: Jesus' Ministry
 - Message to proclaim
 - Rebuke of the people
 - The cross, suffering, was part of Jesus' calling for the redemption of the world.
 - In the cross, the suffering of all places is the righteousness of God
- **Jeremiah 12:2**
 - Plant, Take Root, Grow, Produce
 - Similar to what God says he will use Jeremiah to do (**Jeremiah 1:10**)
 - The Lord returns to this idea in **Jeremiah 12:14-17**
 - From week one; God's sovereignty is at work- Uncertainty is no match for God's Sovereignty
 - God is doing something, even though Jeremiah can't see it
- **Jeremiah 2b-3a**
 - Near their Mouth, but Far from their Heart
 - Jeremiah appeals to his own heart's desire
 - It is out of Jeremiah's mouth that the Word of the Lord is being proclaimed
 - Cell Phone Service: Jeremiah is in the right spot, but the reception on the other end is not good
 - Refer to **Jeremiah 11:20**
 - Jeremiah requests their destruction, which is interesting considering that God told Jeremiah that it was useless to pray for the people, because God would not hear his prayer (Jeremiah 7:16)
 - Jeremiah's expectations do not align with reality
- Sometimes we have to endure suffering without explanation, in order to continue to persevere in the promises of God.
 - The truth is that God was using Jeremiah, even when Jeremiah thought his calling was useless.
 - Jeremiah's reward would come through his suffering, not without it.
 - He needed to be reminded of his calling!
 - We need to be reminded of our calling, and also the Truth of God's word to persevere in times of uncertainty.

Sometimes Things Will Get Worse Before They Get Better

- **Jeremiah 12:5-6**
 - Run with horses illustration

- The worst is yet to come
 - The land is not nearly as bad as what Babylon and Egypt will be like
 - Part of the promise
 - Jeremiah 1:14-15, “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.’”
 - Despite the fact the people won’t listen to God, the Exile is part of God’s plan to not just punish the people for their sin, but to cause them to turn to him
 - Jeremiah is part of God’s plan to speak the message of truth that might sound like judgement now, but when the people are ready to listen, Jeremiah’s message will be a message of grace.
 - It takes going through these tough parts to hear the message of hope and fulfill God’s will
 - What about your family lineage?
 - They have betrayed you.
 - Your people have rejected you
 - There is no one or place for you to turn to
- Sometimes things will get worse before they get better
 - Example of ultra-marathoners
 - Pushing to the extreme
 - At some point it becomes more than just physical ability, but mental endurance to overcome.
 - Research has turned to the mental advantages that running can create
 - The application goes beyond running
 - Our bodies can endure more than we think, but the only way for us to know is to push over the threshold
 - Spiritually we can endure more than we think, but the only way to learn is to push ourselves fully into the hands of God
- Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes, “The isolation of the (Jeremiah) petitioner with this response is not unlike a citizen who learns of conspiracy in government but can find no place to report it, because everyone to whom report might be made is implicated in the conspiracy. Such a grasp of the realities of public life drives one into isolation and/or into life with God.”¹
 - Jeremiah is face with the uncertainty of where to turn
 - The circumstances don’t meet his expectations

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998, Kindle Loc. 1451.

- He has questioned God’s righteousness
 - Where can he turn?
- Relate to Jeremiah 1:17, “Dress yourself for work”
- “If the petition reflects uncertainty about whether God is indeed righteous and reliable, the answer is that the speaker will have to live with that uncertainty. There will be no relief from the uncertainty. God's righteousness is not articulated here.”²
- Will Jeremiah forsake God like his fellow people, or will he listen to the voice of God?
 - Forsaken my house, Abandoned my heritage, Surrendered beloved to the enemies
 - The whole land is made desolate, but no man lays it to heart. (11b)
 - All the metaphors that God uses are related to agriculture. In part, this is
 - because the land of Judah was significant because it defined the region of the people. God gave them the land in response to his covenant promise, however they have not taken responsibility for the land to cultivate it.
- Sometimes things will get worse before they get better.
 - God was still working on behalf of Jeremiah, and he will still be working for us.
 - Circumstances don’t dictate our calling; God dictates our calling.
 - All the more reason to Persevere

God’s Reality is Often Made Clear Through Prayer

- **Jeremiah 12:14-17**
 - The Righteousness of God
 - Pluck and Plant
 - Judah and Neighbors, both on equal covenant ground with God
 - This is unexpected!
 - God’s compassion and plans are always greater than our own!
 - Jeremiah had the opportunity to be a messenger to this great promise and compassion of God, however he had to suffer to be used; similar to Christ!
 - God is always doing something bigger than what we can imagine.
 - Compassion to bring back
 - Pluck and Destroy
 - If they don’t learn the ways of the Lord
 - If they will not listen
 - God’s reality is made clear to Jeremiah through prayer
 - Jeremiah complains, but he also listens
 - Prayer is submission to God’s will
 - Prayer is coming into the presence of God

² Ibid, Kindle Loc. 1441.

- Jesus' prayer in the Garden
- Prayer is not so much about convincing God that he needs to fulfill our request. Prayer is really about us aligning to God's will; and not the other way around.

Conclusion

- We all complain at some point in our lives
 - Some more than others
 - We might be justified in our complaining
 - We may have been wronged
 - Some things could be done better
 - However, stop for a moment in the midst of your complaining, better yet stop yourself before you've started to complain and ask, "Have I given this matter to the Lord?"
 - It's the fundamental question as believers that we must ask, because it is our faith that should define us, not our complaining
 - Sometimes the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer
 - Sometimes things get worse before they get better
 - God's reality is often made clear in prayer