

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 14:1-15:9

Topic

Although Jeremiah's prayers are largely ineffective, God considered him one of the Bible's great intercessors and their talk in these verses communicates volumes about our intimacy with God

Title

"What We've Got Here is a Savior to Communicate"

Introduction

I want to let you in on a secret. I sometimes get discouraged when I read about the effective prayer lives of God's saints.

George Müller comes immediately to mind. In the 1800's he established 117 schools which offered Christian education to over 120,000 children, many of them orphans. Müller prayed about everything and always expected his prayers to be answered positively. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of stories about his answered prayers - miraculous answers at that.

On occasion a person would ask George Müller, "What if God doesn't answer your prayer?" He would tell them that such a failure on God's part was impossible. Man, however had the responsibility to meet certain conditions before expecting an answer from God.

Now I'm doubly discouraged. Not only do my prayers sometime seem ineffective but the reason, given by someone whose prayers were seemingly *always* effective, is that I fail to meet certain spiritual conditions.

What if I were to tell you that one of the greatest intercessors of all time was mostly ineffective? And that it had nothing to do with his failure?

It's true. It was Jeremiah. In our text God will compare Jeremiah's intercession for Judah to that of two other great Old Testament men of prayer, Moses and Samuel. He considered Jeremiah a giant when it came to prayer. Nevertheless Jeremiah's prayers of intercession for Judah had absolutely no effect on averting God's judgment.

Perhaps we need to change our ideas of what constitutes an effective prayer life. Maybe it's more important prayer be *affective*, meaning it recognizes that you are in a passionate dialog with the living God. **Effect** is primarily concerned with getting results whereas **affect** is more about relationship.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Praying Is Affective When You Realize God Is Present, and #2 Your Praying Is Affective When You Remember God Has Promised.

#1 Your Praying Is Affective
When You Realize God Is Present
(14:1-18)

We believe that prayer is simply talking with God. But right after we say that we have a tendency to turn it into a religious activity. We identify five or ten or twenty different types of prayer. We teach seminars on how to do it. We keep lists of our asking and God's answers, implying that only those prayers that are answered are effective.

God measures effectiveness differently than we do. He's going to tell us that Jeremiah is among the great intercessors - something we'd never conclude from a review of the effect of his prayers.

The opening six verses set the stage for Jeremiah's talk with God.

Jeremiah 14:1 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts.
Jeremiah 14:2 "Judah mourns, And her gates languish; They mourn for the land, And the cry of Jerusalem has gone up.

Jeremiah 14:3 Their nobles have sent their lads for water; They went to the cisterns and found no water. They returned with their vessels empty; They were ashamed and confounded And covered their heads.

Jeremiah 14:4 Because the ground is parched, For there was no rain in the land, The plowmen were ashamed; They covered their heads.

Jeremiah 14:5 Yes, the deer also gave birth in the field, But left because there was no grass.

Jeremiah 14:6 And the wild donkeys stood in the desolate heights; They sniffed at the wind like jackals; Their eyes failed because there was no grass."

In His covenant with the Jews God promised abundant rain for their crops if they would walk in obedience to Him. Multiple seasons of "droughts" were a direct judgment from God upon Judah for disobedience.

It's harder for us, as New Testament believers, to analyze circumstances. God often buffets you when you are walking close to Him; He can seem to be blessing you when you are backsliding.

It isn't to confuse you. It's to draw you closer to Him on a moment-by-moment basis. God doesn't want to be a distant deity whose favor you can earn or spurn. He wants to be intimate, up-close-and-personal with you.

Jeremiah talked to God about the droughts.

Jeremiah 14:7 O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, Do it for Your name's sake; For our backslidings are many, We have sinned against You.

Jeremiah 14:8 O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, Why should You be like a stranger in the land, And like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night?

Jeremiah 14:9 Why should You be like a man astonished, Like a mighty one who cannot save? Yet You, O LORD, are in our midst, And we are called by Your name; Do not leave us!

Jeremiah believed God was "in [their] midst." He believed, *he knew*, God was present among them. Further, He understood that God was their "hope" and "Savior."

God, however, was acting like a "stranger" just traveling through who refused to get involved. He was acting like a soldier but one who was too "astonished," too terrified, to fight.

Have you ever told God He was acting like a stranger? Or a deserter? You may have felt that way; you may be feeling that way right now on account of some trial or tragedy.

A.W. Tozer has said, “the notion that there is a God, but that He is comfortably far away, is not embodied in the doctrinal statement of the Christian church.”

Isaac Watts wrote,

*Within Thy circling power I stand,
On every side I find Thy hand.
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
I am surrounded with my God*

Doctrinally we call this God’s omnipresence. But we must learn to **practice** His presence. Maybe we should call it ‘practi-presence.’

Jeremiah was, in fact, practicing the presence of God. God *couldn’t* be a stranger; He *couldn’t* be a deserter. He was there, in their midst, their “hope,” their “Savior.”

Jeremiah 14:10 Thus says the LORD to this people: "Thus they have loved to wander; They have not restrained their feet. Therefore the LORD does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, And punish their sins."

Jeremiah 14:11 Then the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good.

Jeremiah 14:12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence."

Historically the nation of Judah had passed a point of no return. They refused to repent - even after 40 years of Jeremiah pleading with them.

Yes, it’s possible to pass a point of no return. But since we cannot see the hearts of men, our attitude ought to be that the point of no return is after death. Until then we urge men everywhere to repent and trust the Lord.

Jeremiah 14:13 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' "

God told Jeremiah “do not pray for this people, for their good.” Jeremiah’s response was to go right on seeking their good, pointing out that the people were being deceived by false prophets.

Now you’d think that in the school of prayer when God said “Quit praying!” that you’d flunk-out if you disobeyed Him. But Jeremiah kept praying. That’s because he didn’t think of himself as being in a school of prayer. He didn’t think about what he was doing as offering intercessory prayer. He was simply talking *to* and *with* the Lord.

Jeremiah 14:14 And the LORD said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.

Jeremiah 14:15 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land' - 'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed!

Jeremiah 14:16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; they will have no one to bury them - them nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters - for I will pour their wickedness on them.'

If you are deceived by a false prophet or teacher, it’s not God’s fault. He has given you His Word as a measure to test all things.

Jeremiah 14:17 "Therefore you shall say this word to them: 'Let my eyes flow with tears night and day, And let them not cease; For the virgin daughter of my people Has been broken with a mighty stroke, with a very severe blow.

Jeremiah 14:18 If I go out to the field, Then behold, those slain with the sword! And if I enter the city, Then behold, those sick from famine! Yes, both prophet and priest go about in a land they do not know.' "

God was describing Himself in these verses. He was the Father whose “virgin daughter” was taken violently, whose people were “slain” and “sick.” It brought Him no pleasure to allow the Jews to be overrun by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It brought Him pain.

God shared His heart with Jeremiah. He shared His grief, His sorrow, His pain, His disappointment. Prayer, then, isn’t just about getting God to do something or to not do something. **It’s about getting to know God.**

God is present. He is omnipresent; wherever you are, there He is in your midst. Because His presence is spiritual, we can think Him distant. For example. In literature and film there are certain characters who can be called upon at great need. Obi-won Kenobi is like that. Every now and then Luke Skywalker can cry out for his help and Obi-won can remind him to “use the force.”

(If you are familiar with *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil is such a character).

I dare say sometimes without meaning to we think of God that way! We go about our day as if He is in His distant Heaven, knowing that we can call upon Him at great need to use the ‘force,’ as it were, to help us. It’s why we think of prayer only in terms of its effectiveness when, in reality, it is its *affect* that is most critical.

By His Spirit, He lives in you. He tells us in the Bible that He is especially desiring to manifest His presence when Christian get together.

God is present. He is in you and in your midst. Talk to Him as if you understood that; as if you are turning to address Him directly rather than sending long distance messages to Heaven. Practice His presence.

#2 Your Praying Is Affective
When You Remember God Has Promised
(14:19-15:9)

In his next statements Jeremiah remembered that God had made a covenant, a promise, with the Jews.

Jeremiah 14:19 Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have You stricken us so that there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but there was no good; And for the time of healing, and there was trouble.

Jeremiah 14:20 We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness And the iniquity of our fathers, For we have sinned against You.

Jeremiah 14:21 Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake; Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember, do not break Your covenant with us.

Jeremiah 14:22 Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are You not He, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait for You, Since You have made all these.

Jeremiah was hardcore. God told Him to quit praying for and seeking the good of Judah but here he boldly asked the Lord to bring rain.

Jeremiah knew God could never “utterly” and totally “[reject] Judah” on account of His “covenant” to them through Abraham and David. Some of those promises were conditional upon obedience; but many were unconditional.

God has promised you and I so much more! Spiritual blessings in heavenly places; eternal rewards; a mansion in a forever city where the Lord is the light and life of the place. *How can I not be affected?*

Our attitude should be that expressed by Jeremiah in the last thing he said - “Therefore we will wait for you...” It’s a particular type of waiting. It’s power-waiting. We wait trusting in the infallibility of His promises.

Jeremiah 15:1 Then the LORD said to me, “Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.

Moses and Samuel were two great Old Testament intercessors.

- Moses told God if He didn’t spare the Israelites to blot his own name out of the Book of Life (Exodus 32:32).
- Samuel once said, “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you...” (First Samuel 12:23). Only someone in constant intercession could say that.

The mention of these two giants put Jeremiah in their category. Jeremiah was one of God’s great intercessors - **even though his intercessory prayers would not be effective.**

The remaining verses of our text express more of the coming judgment. There is also an interesting insight to prayer.

Jeremiah 15:2 And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Such as are for death, to death; And such as are for the sword, to the sword; And such as are for the famine, to the famine; And such as are for the captivity, to the captivity." '

Jeremiah 15:3 "And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction," says the LORD: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

Jeremiah 15:4 I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 15:5 "For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing?

Jeremiah 15:6 You have forsaken Me," says the LORD, "You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting!

Jeremiah 15:7 And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people, Since they do not return from their ways.

Jeremiah 15:8 Their widows will be increased to Me more than the sand of the seas; I will bring against them, Against the mother of the young men, A plunderer at noonday; I will cause anguish and terror to fall on them suddenly.

Jeremiah 15:9 "She languishes who has borne seven; She has breathed her last; Her sun has gone down While it was yet day; She has been ashamed and confounded. And the remnant of them I will deliver to the sword Before their enemies," says the LORD.

Let's concentrate on verse four. "Manasseh the son of Hezekiah" was the king who began Judah's downfall into idolatry. He was king from 696-642BC. One Bible dictionary described his reign this way.

The abominations of various lands, especially of Babylon, were brought together [by him] at Jerusalem, "altars for Baalim, "groves" and altars for the host of heaven, in the two courts of the Lord's house." "He caused too his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom," the old Moloch worship of Ammon; and in imitation of the Babylonians "observed times, enchantments, witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit and wizards." A religion of sensuous intoxication reigned on all sides. He made a graven image of the Asheerah (the obscene symbol of the phallic worship), for which women dedicated to impurity wove hangings in Jehovah's house! Sodomites' houses stood nigh to Jehovah's house, for the vilest purposes in the name of religion, Jehovah's altar was cast down, the ark was displaced, the sabbath, the weekly witness for God, was ignored.

Here is something important to realize. In 701BC Hezekiah became seriously ill (Isaiah 38:1-21). Isaiah warned the king to prepare for his

approaching death but Hezekiah prayed that God would intervene. God answered by promising Hezekiah fifteen more years of life.

It was during those extra fifteen years that Manasseh was born!

Hezekiah did a few weird things, too, in those bonus years. One commentator stated bluntly,

It would have been far better both for Hezekiah and the whole nation of Judah if Hezekiah had died on God's "original" timetable. If Hezekiah had died "on schedule," Manasseh would never have lived and deep national rebellion and dissipation would not have taken hold if Hezekiah had not been given 15 additional years.

If you judge prayer by its effectiveness, then Hezekiah had an incredibly effective prayer life! He was able to gain fifteen years of life after God told him he was going to die.

For his part, Jeremiah's intercession accomplished nothing for Judah.

But God elevated Jeremiah to the status of Moses and Samuel while letting us know that Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was the source of Judah's decline.

God looks upon prayer much differently than we do. An effective prayer life is one more affective, achieved by having a sense of God's presence and promises.

Talk to God - all the time. He is not a distant force, but your closest friend.