



The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 19:14 - 20:18

Topic

Jeremiah tried to quit delivering God's prophecies only to find that God's word was a fire in his bones

Title

"The Bone Fire of the Prophecies"

Introduction

I remember our Sega Genesis system, back in the stone ages of video game consoles, playing NBA Jam. When you really got going and were about to dunk over the head of your opponent the announcer would exclaim, "he's on fire!"

Christians are sometimes described as being "on fire for the Lord." It means they are totally committed, sold-out, going for it in their walk with the Lord.

Jeremiah was on fire for the Lord. He said of himself, "His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones..." (20:9).

Publicly he was on fire in the traditional sense, proclaiming God's Word with boldness. Privately, however, he was experiencing fire in a very different sense.

When he spoke of the fire in his heart and bones **it was during a time in which he was trying hard to quit serving the Lord.** He went on to say, "I was weary of holding it back," indicating he was exerting a great deal of effort trying to quench the internal fire.

There are, then, these two ways to be on fire:

1. The first is the public way in which you are advancing the kingdom of God.
2. The second is the private way in which you wrestle with doubts and fears and can despair even of life itself.

I'm so thankful for Jeremiah's honesty; otherwise I might think I'm the only one who sometimes feels that way in private.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Have A Mission To Speak Forcefully To Men, and #2 You Have Permission To Speak Freely With God.

#1 You Have A Mission
To Speak Forcefully To Men
(19:14-20:6)

By "forcefully" I mean *with authority*. It's the Word of God you are speaking by which men can have their sins forgiven and be saved or by which they remain condemned in their sins.

Jeremiah spoke with authority in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 19:14-15

14 Then Jeremiah came from Tophet, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the Lord's house and said to all the people,

15 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on this city and on all her towns all the doom that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks that they might not hear My words.' "

This message wasn't recorded for us - only the usual theme that Judah was inevitably to be humbled by an invading nation.

Jeremiah did introduce a new illustration. When he called them 'stiff-necked' the people would have understood him to be comparing them to disobedient oxen who would not take direction from the master plowing with them.

At least one person in the audience had heard enough.

Jeremiah 20:1-2

1 Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things.

2 Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.

Pashhur was the chief of the Temple police force tasked with maintaining order. Although he was not posing any real threat, Pashhur determined to punish Jeremiah. When it says he "struck" him it most likely means he had Jeremiah flogged with the usual thirty-nine lashes.

Afterwards he locked him in the stocks - an incredibly painful, contorted position for your body to maintain. This marked the first, but not the last, physical persecution of God's prophet.

Jeremiah 20:3-6

3 And it happened on the next day that Pashhur brought Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord has not called your name Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib.

4 For thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it. I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword.

5 Moreover I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its precious things; all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies, who will plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon.

6 And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. You shall go to Babylon, and there you shall die, and be buried there, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied lies.' "

A night spent in the stocks after a brutal beating did nothing to dampen Jeremiah's fire for the Word of God. He boldly proclaimed Pashhur's new name to be *fear on every side*. It was a prediction of what Pashhur could expect to happen to him. The name change was accompanied by a prophecy in which Babylon was named as the invader for the first time.

Talk about being on fire. Jeremiah came through the persecution with a holy boldness and he, without hesitation, continued his preaching.

Like Jeremiah we have a message to share, the Gospel, and an audience to share it with - family, friends, and everyone we might come into contact with. The same power that emboldened Jeremiah, even after a beating and imprisonment, indwells us.

Be encouraged... **but understand if you serve the Lord you will also come face-to-face with tremendous discouragement.**

#2 You Have Permission
To Speak Freely With God
(20:7-18)

We are going to wonder if these verses describe the same guy we just saw boldly rebuke the chief of police. They do, and that is why they are so meaningful to us in our own private times of despair.

Jeremiah 20:7-8

7 O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; Everyone mocks me.

8 For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, "Violence and plunder!" Because the word of the Lord was made to me A reproach and a derision daily.

You might recall that Jeremiah was initially reluctant to answer God's call. Looking back on it he was now of the opinion that God had persuaded him to answer the call by overpowering him.

Jeremiah's recollections were not entirely true. The Lord told him from the start that his ministry would be difficult. Following the Lord IS always going to be difficult. Jesus made no excuses for the fact that since the world hated Him, it will hate you. In the world you WILL have tribulation was His promise. Discipleship is carrying a Cross daily.

Jeremiah 20:9

9 Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.

Jeremiah tried to write a letter of resignation. He couldn't do it. He couldn't contain God's Word. He got "weary" trying.

Truth is, you **can** quit if you really want to. We all know believers who are no longer really serving the Lord. They don't seem to have any internal fire upsetting them, nor are they weary from resisting.

That's because they have succeeded where Jeremiah failed They have pressed through and quenched the fire of the Holy Spirit. They have resisted the Lord. You're seeing them after the fact, settled in to a mediocre spiritual life.

Is that what you want? Mediocrity? I think not.

Jeremiah 20:10

10 For I heard many mocking: "Fear on every side!" "Report," they say, "and we will report it!" All my acquaintances watched for my stumbling, saying, "Perhaps he can be induced; Then we will prevail against him, And we will take our revenge on him."

Jeremiah had renamed Pashhur "fear on every side" predicting the Babylonian invasion. Nothing had happened; not yet, so they mocked him. All eyes were on him - to see him fall and fail. The whole world seemed against him.

Jeremiah had a breakthrough in the next set of verses.

Jeremiah 20:11-13

11 But the Lord is with me as a mighty, awesome One. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper. Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten.

12 But, O Lord of hosts, You who test the righteous, And see the mind and heart, Let me see Your vengeance on them; For I have pleaded my cause before You.

13 Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor From the hand of evildoers.

Jeremiah realized all things were working together for the good. He remembered that he was being tested through his troubles. He reckoned that everything was going to unfold according to God's plan.

His heart began to sing praises to the Lord. The song, however, didn't last long.

Jeremiah 20:14-18

14 Cursed be the day in which I was born! Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me!

15 Let the man be cursed Who brought news to my father, saying, "A male child has been born to you!" Making him very glad.

16 And let that man be like the cities Which the Lord overthrew,
and did not relent; Let him hear the cry in the morning And the
shouting at noon,

17 Because he did not kill me from the womb, That my mother
might have been my grave, And her womb always enlarged with
me.

18 Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow,
That my days should be consumed with shame?

Jeremiah wished he'd never been born. He wished that he had
died in the womb - that his mother's womb had been his grave.

I want you to notice that this chapter ends here. It ends abruptly.
There's no response from the Lord. Neither a rebuke nor an
encouragement. It's so stunning that commentators rearrange
the chapter to end with the praise section.

What we do see is this. Chapter twenty-one opens by saying,
"the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord..." God kept
speaking to Jeremiah; Jeremiah kept boldly proclaiming the
prophetic word.

In earlier confessions like this, when Jeremiah poured out his
heart, God answered him in various ways. If you look at the
confessions of David and Paul you'll see God answer them in
various ways. Sometimes He spoke to them, either
encouragement or rebuke. Sometimes He gave them Scripture,
or a vision. Other times He was silent - at least as far as what is
recorded for us in the Word.

**But all the time the understanding was that your help would
come directly from Him.**

In the private confessions of Jeremiah we encounter "the entire spectrum of human, emotional distress: fear of shame, fear of failure, loss of strength, doubting of faith, loneliness, pity, disappointment turning to hostility towards God."

I think some of us - *maybe a lot of us* - have been there. Maybe you're there right now. If you are, **you're in good company.**

Jeremiah was discouraged. David was often discouraged. The apostle Paul described the care of the churches as an anxiety.

The prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, was given to fits of discouragement. He would often break out into uncontrollable crying for no apparent reason.

What did these men do about their discouragement? **They spoke freely to the Lord about it.**

Behind the scenes, in private, Jeremiah spoke freely to the Lord. He poured out his heart and in it were doubts and fears and regrets and disappointments and discouragement. At times he despaired of life itself.

God brought him through it. We want to know how.

I don't know how, exactly, because we're not told "how"; not here. What we are shown is "Who," not "how." All we know is that Jeremiah talked with the Lord and then went on serving Him.

Think of it like this. People often find a group to try to identify with, to be among people similarly struggling. The very fact there are others who have the same struggles helps them tremendously, as does talking it out. There's always a facilitator, a counselor, who can fully relate to them.

Well, if you are broken, discouraged, desperate - **then you have a 'group.'** It's been attended by Jeremiah, and David, and Paul, and many other servants of God. There are a great cloud of witnesses that have gone before you.

It's facilitated by Jesus Christ, who is called in the Bible "Wonderful Counselor." He knows your every thought. He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He sweat great drops of blood for you one night in a garden on His way to die on the Cross.

If you can find someone, another saint, to talk to, that's great. It's actually quite rare because, on the one hand you might stumble them with your honesty; and on the other hand they may give you cliché answers that make you feel even worse.

Jeremiah had no one else to talk with, nowhere else to go. There was no group meeting for reproached prophets. Mean time society was crumbling around him as the people sunk further into idolatry and immorality. Everything he knew and loved was going to be destroyed and he, too, would be exiled.

His plight preaches to us that Jesus is our sufficiency; He is always enough. While we may have greater resources at our disposal to aid us in our discouragement, they must eventually point to Him as our sole sufficiency.

If talking to the Lord isn't enough, we will gladly talk to you until it is. But it will always be Jesus we point you to.

One commentator wrote, "From Jeremiah's confessions we learn that God does not call only those who have purged themselves from all weaknesses and who have achieved a high degree of perfection. He does not extend his call only to the brave, to those who never have doubts or problems. But he entrusts his treasures to earthen vessels, frail creatures of dust."

You have a friend closer than any brother in Jesus who is ready to hear you pour out your heart.

Maybe you've quenched the fire, resisted His promptings. Repent of it and rededicate yourself to picking up the Cross.

If you are in the throes of some discouragement, let Him be your Wonderful Counselor. Keep pouring out your heart until He reveals something of Himself to you that puts everything into perspective. It may be a word or Scripture or a vision; or it may be the silent ministry of His presence made known to your heart. It may take time; be patient knowing that He who began a good work in you will perform it until you see Him face-to-face.

Pour out your heart to Him. You have permission to speak freely. Then get up on fire.