



The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 45:1-5

Topic

Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, expresses that he wanted more out of life than he was going to get serving The Lord

Title

"Look for the Bare(uch) Necessities"

Introduction

In the 1970 film, *The Out-of-Towners*, Gwen and George Kellerman arrive in New York so that George can interview for a job promotion.

Their last name should have been Murphy because everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. From the moment they depart their home town of Twin Oaks, Ohio, the couple suffers nearly every indignity out-of-towners possibly could experience:

- Heavy fog forces their flight to circle around Kennedy International Airport repeatedly and finally to be rerouted to Boston's Logan Airport, where they discover their luggage - in which George's ulcer medication and Gwen's extra cash are packed - was left behind.
- Just missing the train at South Station, they chase it to the next stop by cab, board it and wait two hours for seats in the dining car, only to discover the only food left are peanut butter sandwiches, green olives, and crackers.
- Upon arrival at Grand Central Terminal in New York, penniless, they discover that mass transit, taxicab drivers, and sanitation workers all are on strike.
- Making their way to the Waldorf-Astoria on foot past tons of garbage in a torrential downpour, they discover their reservation - guaranteed for a 10:00pm arrival - has been given away, and the hotel - like every other one in the city - is booked to capacity due to the strikes.

Those are followed by a series of calamities that includes two muggings, kidnapping by armed liquor store robbers while the Kellermans are riding in a police car, a cracked tooth, broken high heels, an exploding manhole cover, expulsion from a church, and an attack by protestors in front of the Cuban embassy.

The only thing that goes right for George is he somehow manages to arrive on time for his interview. Despite receiving a very lucrative offer, the two realize a move to the big city is not for them and they make the decision to return to Ohio.

Their flight home is hijacked to Cuba. The film ends with Gwen exclaiming, *"Oh my God!"*

We find it humorously entertaining - until something like that happens in real life, either to us or to those we love. Then we, too, cry out to God.

Things were going from bad to worse for Baruch (pronounced ***Bare-uck***), Jeremiah's secretary. His version of "Oh my God!" is to cry out "The Lord has added grief to my sorrow!" (v3).

My gut reaction would be to say to Baruch, "No, He hasn't; God wouldn't do that." Then I read verse four:

Jeremiah 45:4 "Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land.' "

God's planned actions against His people *were* adding to Baruch's grief. Things were bad in Judah but they were going to get a whole lot worse; and it would definitely affect Baruch's quality of life.

We all have moments like that. It's when you get diagnosed with a chronic, even terminal, condition. Or when you receive the news a loved one has died. Or when something you cherish changes forever. Or when you come to realize you won't fulfill your dream.

Perhaps we can learn something from Baruch to help us in those trying times.

I'll organize my thoughts along those lines around two questions: #1 When God Adds Grief, Do You Mourn Greatness?, and #2 When God Adds Grief, Doesn't He Multiply Grace?

#1 When God Adds Grief Do You Mourn Greatness?

(v1-4a)

It's an odd question, I admit; but it's suggested by God's answer to Baruch in verse five, where He asks him if he was seeking great things for himself.

We've met Baruch before. He was Jeremiah's secretary, writing down the prophecies God gave him. He's responsible for us having these words, this book, today.

He was probably a servant to Jeremiah as well. In their culture he would have been perceived as a disciple. He was the Joshua to Jeremiah's Moses; he was the Elisha to Jeremiah's Elijah.

Along those lines the Hebrew translation of verse three, instead of saying "I found no **rest**," is, "I found not **prophecy**." Baruch came to the realization he was not going to be a prophet and the successor to Jeremiah. He was not destined to be a Joshua or an Elisha.

Hold that thought while we get into the opening verse.

Jeremiah 45:1 The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the instruction of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying,

Our chapter is out of chronological order. These events occurred before the final fall of Jerusalem and before Jeremiah and Baruch were taken against their will to Egypt. They occurred just after Baruch wrote down the last of Jeremiah's prophecies to Judah predicting the final fall of Jerusalem.

It was then, as he took down that final dictation, that things hit home for Baruch. He realized that the destruction of the city and the Temple were inevitable. It was his "O my God!" moment when he understood that whatever desires he had for ministry, or for advancing in life, or even for living a quiet life in retirement, were over.

The Lord heard his cry:

Jeremiah 45:2 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch:
Jeremiah 45:3 'You said, "Woe is me now! For the LORD has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest." '

To say Baruch was at a low point would be an understatement. He strung together a series of words to express his discouragement - "woe... grief... sorrow." It was affecting him physically; he "fainted," could only sigh, and could "find no rest."

You've been there, haven't you? Heard something that made you feel like you'd just been punched in the gut? Had your heart ripped out? Felt sick to your stomach by some terrible news?

Take comfort that God absolutely hears your cry. In the New Testament we're told He can hear even our unintelligible groanings and that the indwelling Holy Spirit interprets them for the Father.

Take comfort that God absolutely hears your cry. In the New Testament we're told He can hear even our unintelligible groanings and that the indwelling Holy Spirit interprets them for the Father.

The fact God hears your cries can then be coupled with one of His names to speak volumes to your heart. The particular name I'm thinking of is found in Second Corinthians 1:3 where God is called "the God of all comfort."

I take "all" to mean, firstly, that His comfort is inexhaustible. He has plenty to dispense. We may try to comfort someone and, sometimes, the only thing we can say is, "I don't know what to say." Not so for our Heavenly Father. He always knows what to say.

I secondly take "all" to mean that His comfort can come in many and various different forms. It can come in the form of another person; or a Scripture that ministers to your heart; or a healing. Likewise it can come as the strength to endure your hardship.

Hmm. I like to think of comfort as the removal of un-comfort, not strength to endure un-comfort. But that is to limit the work of God upon my heart and in my life. I must give Him more freedom than expecting He must always resolve my suffering to my personal standard of satisfaction.

Look at Baruch. He seemed on track to succeed Jeremiah. That may not seem a thing to be desired, given the response of the Jews to Jeremiah. But for Baruch it was his professional identity; it was his career. It would make the decades of serving in the shadows worthwhile to finally have the mantle of the prophet upon his shoulders.

It wasn't to be.

Jeremiah 45:4 "Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land.

These words are a great summary of the previous forty-four chapters of prophecy. They are the *Cliff's Notes* version of the Book of Jeremiah. Judah would fall and the Jews be exiled to Babylon. There would be no repentance, no revival - only discipline and difficulty.

God put His finger on Baruch's pulse in verse five.

Jeremiah 45:5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the LORD...

We can't really say, exactly, what "great things" Baruch was thinking he would accomplish in his life. As we've seen, the text suggests he might have been disappointed he would not prophesy or follow in Jeremiah's footsteps.

"Great things" doesn't necessarily mean extraordinary accomplishments. One contemporary English version translates the phrase by saying, "don't make any big plans for yourself."

Truth is, we all have big plans; we all have things we'd like to accomplish in our lives. I'm guessing that most of our big plans are not "great things" like achieving world peace or single-handedly evangelizing every human being.

Our plans are, however, "great" to us. It would be "great" to live a long, quiet life loving others and being loved by them. It would be "great" to work hard, play hard, then retire to enjoy things that we put off.

There is nothing wrong with any of those plans; there is nothing wrong with having basic dreams and desires. However, their fulfillment is not always possible.

"What screws us up most in life is the picture in our head of how it is supposed to be."

I came across this quote: "What screws us up most in life is the picture in our head of how it is supposed to be."

Baruch had a picture in his head of how it was supposed to be. His desire to "seek great things for [him]self" had to be tempered by the times in which he lived.

It wasn't a time for a Joshua to lead the Jews to conquest in the Promised Land; or for an Elisha to double the number of miracles Elijah had done.

It was a time when God must severely discipline the Jews in ways that would negatively effect not just those in sin but those who were walking with Him. It was a time for His servants to reveal His grace in the midst of a rebellious people who were held captive and exiled.

Baruch didn't know it but he was going to have an amazing ministry. Not during his lifetime, but afterwards. Very few individuals have an entire chapter in the Bible dedicated to them; he does. We already pointed out that he is to be credited with the writing of this amazing book of prophecy.

He's not mentioned often in this book but when he is you see him serving God and Jeremiah faithfully. He has thus encouraged generations of believers.

I ran across a fascinating fact about Baruch in the realm of biblical archaeology. Baruch happens to be the only man from the Old Testament who has been fingerprinted.

Something called "markers" were the bookmarks of the ancient world. In 1975 a group of archaeologists purchased some clay document markers from an Arab antiquities dealer. The archaeologists did not decipher the markers until 1986. When they did, they discovered that one of them bears the seal of Baruch son of Neriah. Since then another document marker has been discovered that bears not only Baruch's seal but also a thumbprint, very probably the thumbprint of the scribe himself.

God heard the cry of His faithful servant, interpreted the inner groanings of his heart, and then tenderly but firmly let Baruch know that at this time, and in this place, He didn't need a successor to Jeremiah. Baruch must therefore abandon the "great things" he was seeking because he would find his rest not in them but in his relationship with God.

#2 When God Adds Grief Doesn't He Multiply Grace?

(v4b-5)

We've only a few words left in verse five but they are big words that amplify the grace of God towards Baruch and, ultimately, toward us as well.

Jeremiah 45:5 ... "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go." ' ' "

We've heard something like this before. A certain Ethiopian eunuch, called by his title Ebed-melech, meaning *servant of the king*, intervened to save Jeremiah's life when he had been thrown into a cistern and left to die. Ebed-melech was told God would give him his life as a prize. We saw that the word for "prize" really means *spoils of war*.

Even though the Chaldean army of Nebuchadnezzar was victorious over the Jews, God saw His faithful servants like Ebed-melech and Baruch as His true spoils of war.

We sometimes use the expression, "I feel like I've been in a war," to describe life when it's not going our way. Well, you are in a war; or, at least, in a war zone. Spiritual warfare is raging all around you. There's a battle for the souls of men and women and children.

Although the ultimate outcome of the conflict was settled at the Cross of Jesus Christ, where the devil was definitely defeated, he fights on to rob, kill, and destroy until the return of Jesus to the earth to fully claim what He purchased by His death and resurrection. We serve The Lord on that battlefield.

Who's your favorite superhero? Whoever it is, they either have super powers or super gadgets that elevate them above the average human being. We see our heroes and heroines as being bigger, faster, stronger, smarter.

No matter your favorite superhero, the greatest superhero of all time... Is Jesus Christ. He is a kind of antihero to our way of thinking, meaning He lacks conventional heroic attributes. After all, He is described as laying aside His divine power and living as a man in total submission to God the Father. When they came to seize Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said He could command legions of angels; but He didn't. He let Himself be taken all the way to the shame of His death on the Cross.

Jesus once described the attributes of a true hero. He did it in His Sermon on the Mount in the passage we call the Beatitudes.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

We invent Superman or Batman when God says the true hero is Meek Man.

It sounds funny, doesn't it? "If only Meek Man were here! He'd save us!"

You know what? *He was here and he did save his people.* The Bible says of Moses, "now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

What did Meek Man do? He led millions of God's people free from slavery and destroyed the most powerful army on the earth at that time. He received God's Law and applied it to a stubborn and disobedient people. He struck a rock in the wilderness and torrents of water came out to refresh the people. Those who opposed him were swallowed up by the earth.

All the while God, from Heaven, could say, "There; that's my prize - the spoil of spiritual warfare. A man who will simply walk with me in meekness."

Baruch was a man like that; so are you. Looking down upon Baruch from His throne in Heaven, God could say "I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go."

In every circumstance of Baruch's life - whether in Judah where he currently was or in Egypt where he would be taken against his will or in Babylon where some scholars believe he ended up - God would look upon Him and exclaim to anyone with ears to hear, man or angel or demon, "That's my prize!"

When you find yourself in a circumstance that lends itself to crying out to God, to groanings that cannot be uttered, God can multiply His grace to you and bring forth the true spoils of war - poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness and the rest of the beatitudes, as well as the fruit of the Spirit.

It may not be the "great things" you had in mind; but if it reveals the grace of God it proves that **you** are His great treasure on this earth.