

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 15:10-21

Topic

Like many prophets before and after him, Jeremiah complains to God that he was being persecuted as a bearer of bad news

Title

"The Bad News Bearer"

Introduction

If there's one guy you don't want to bring bad news to, it's Darth Vader.

- After losing the *Millenium Falcon* when it emerged from the asteroid field, Captain Needer took a shuttle to apologize to Vader personally and got the telekinetic strangulation treatment for his trouble.
- Vader likewise killed Admiral Ozzel for alerting the Rebels to the Imperial presence by coming out of hyperspace too close to the planet Hoth. He didn't give him the common courtesy of killing him in person. Rather, Vader killed him over the comm view screen and you see him gasping and choking to death.

There's an old expression, "Don't kill (or, don't shoot) the messenger," meaning that often folks *do* react with hostility towards the bearer of bad news.

The sixth century poster-boy for bearing really, really horrible news was the prophet Jeremiah. God had a message for His wayward nation, the nation of Judah. It was all doom and gloom, judgment and death.

Life as God's messenger was starting to get to Jeremiah.

- First he wished he had never been born.
- Then he lashed out at God, telling God He was “an unreliable stream... waters that fail” (v18).

You and I may not be prophets of the Lord. **But we are every bit messengers.**

I can support the claim Christians are messengers from the Great Commission Jesus gave all His disciples when He said,

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

- Or I could cite Jesus’ words to His followers to go to the ends of the earth testifying of Him after they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
- Or I could cite the apostle Paul who described Christians as “living letters” “known and read by all men” (Second Corinthians 3:2).

Even a quick overview of the New Testament will reveal that **Christian messengers don’t always fare very well in delivering their message.** While what we have to share is definitely Good News, it is “a savor of death” to those who refuse to receive the message about Jesus Christ and they tend to want to persecute or kill the messenger.

Like Jeremiah, when we find ourselves in some peril we can vilify God. After all, we are serving Him, loving Him, *and look how He allows us to be treated?*

OR we can determine to instead glorify God, looking to Jesus.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Perils As A Messenger Can Influence You To Vilify God, or #2 God’s Passion As The Messenger Can Inspire You To Glorify God.

#1 Your Perils As A Messenger
Can Influence You To Vilify God
(v10-18)

Ever wish you'd never been born? If so, you can relate to Jeremiah because that's how he was feeling.

Jeremiah 15:10 Woe is me, my mother, That you have borne me, A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent for interest, Nor have men lent to me for interest. Every one of them curses me.

Even though he was a prophet of God, Jeremiah commanded no more respect than a ruthless lender or an irresponsible borrower.

Forget Jeremiah for just a moment and think instead of Jesus. The Son of God, the Second Person of the trinity, through whom all things were made and without whom was not anything made that was made... He was largely despised and rejected. He was accused of being a drunk and a glutton. A cloud of illegitimacy hung over His life due to the circumstances of His birth.

If He is your Savior, your Lord, you can't really expect to be treated any better, can you?

Jeremiah 15:11 The LORD said: "Surely it will be well with your remnant; Surely I will cause the enemy to intercede with you In the time of adversity and in the time of affliction.

This is a small but powerful word of encouragement from the Lord. It would "be well with your remnant" meant God would honor His covenant with Abraham and David. The Jews would not be totally destroyed.

And among Jeremiah's enemies some would soon be humbled to ask him to intercede for them out of desperation.

However, the heart of Jeremiah's message was that judgment was barreling down upon Judah.

Jeremiah 15:12 Can anyone break iron, The northern iron and the bronze?

Babylon was “the northern iron and the bronze.” Nothing could stop her advance to conquer Judah.

Jeremiah 15:13 Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder without price, Because of all your sins, Throughout your territories.

Jeremiah 15:14 And I will make you cross over with your enemies Into a land which you do not know; For a fire is kindled in My anger, Which shall burn upon you."

Commentators are split on whether God was addressing Jeremiah personally or the Jews corporately. I think it's best to say God was addressing the Jews and that Jeremiah was included among them - not because of his sin but because he must identify with them.

Although he had done nothing wrong, he, too, would lose his “wealth” and “treasures” and would “cross over... into a land” he did not know. In Jeremiah's case that would be Egypt. We'll see later in this book that, after the Babylonians conquered Judah, some of the Jews left in the land fled to Egypt, against God's advice through Jeremiah, and took him with them.

God had a strange way of encouraging His discouraged prophet. He told Jeremiah that things were definitely going to get much worse.

Jeremiah 15:15 O LORD, You know; Remember me and visit me, And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke.

Jeremiah couldn't handle the truth. He objected to being taken away anywhere, and especially by those who persecuted him.

He asked God to instead take “vengeance” on his persecutors. It wasn't enough for God to tell Jeremiah he was doing exactly what he was supposed to do. Jeremiah wanted others to know it, too.

Jeremiah exclaimed, “for Your sake I have suffered rebuke.” Every Christian, at some point in their life on earth, is going to say, “for Your sake I have suffered rebuke.” **It's how you say it that matters!**

- The apostle Paul rejoiced saying it in Romans 8:36, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."
- After being beaten by the Jewish leaders and publicly humiliated, the apostles rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

That's not the tone in Jeremiah's voice. He was blaming God. And it got worse.

Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.

Jeremiah looked back and thought of his call to the ministry. God had come to Jeremiah and he had accepted the call. He compared it to eating God's words - meaning he committed totally to it.

Now if you will recall, Jeremiah shared a few doubts at his calling; he wasn't exactly gung-ho. He made no mention of the fact God also told him he would suffer. Jeremiah had selective memory. This is revisionist history.

By the way, if no one told you at the time of your conversion, let me right that wrong: **You are going to suffer many things as a Christian. In the world you will have tribulation.**

Brace yourself for Jeremiah's big blow-up.

Jeremiah 15:17 I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, Nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, For You have filled me with indignation.

Jeremiah 15:18 Why is my pain perpetual And my wound incurable, Which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, As waters that fail?

My free paraphrase goes like this: "God, I was righteous among the wicked. I walked the narrow path. I adopted your attitude of indignation against sin. And what did you do, God? You wounded me, or you certainly let me be wounded; and now you won't take away my pain, even though you could."

Wow. Get it together, Jeremiah! And yet, be honest; Haven't **you** ever felt that way? *Maybe you feel that way right now.*

He accused God of being an "unreliable stream," "waters that fail." Having been influenced by the New Testament, and remembering Jesus' promise that He would be to us a continual source of living water, this is a scathing accusation, an insult of huge proportions.

Truth is, the world is full of moments when we ask, "Why, God?," "Why us?," "Why now?" Behind the question is the feeling that the waters of God have somehow dried-up or are being held back.

I'm going to explore an answer to those questions in verses nineteen through twenty-one. For now I want to dwell a brief moment on the reality of evil and suffering and pain in our world - what I'm calling your 'perils.'

These perils that befall us, we can't help but think God could have stopped them from happening. He could have protected us. It's only one small thought from thinking He *could* have to saying He *should* have.

If we're not careful we can vilify God; we make Him out to be the villain, maybe not directly but indirectly, by His supposed inaction.

- For some people it's done openly. They let you know they are angry with God. They turn their back on Him. They walk away from Him.
- For some Christians, they vilify God in their hearts while trying to keep their Christian game face on. Over time what they think in their hearts erodes their faith and they drift away on a tide of bitterness and anger.

Theologians are all over the map trying to give 'the' answer to the question, "Why, God?" At the extremes, they either make God the author of evil and try to get you to believe that it somehow glorifies Him, or they propose that God has lost control of His universe. In other words, the standard answers are shallow and hollow.

What's the answer? It's to be found in God's response to Jeremiah.

#2 God's Passion As The Messenger
Can Inspire You To Glorify God
(v19-21)

Let me give you the bottom line. In light of his discouragement God told Jeremiah to "return." That's a curious command because, from our point of view, *Jeremiah hadn't gone away from God*. In fact, he was having a direct, if doubtful, dialog with God.

God nevertheless said to "return." To what? **To God**. "Return" to knowing that God IS your living water, your inexhaustible stream. "Return" to knowing God is your all-in-all. In Him you have *everything* you need and could ever desire regardless the blessings the world has to offer or the buffetings it has to dish out.

If you are a messenger, God is your Messenger. (I made-up that word, but you get it!). You and He, sharing fellowship, *that's as good as it gets*; and it's pretty great, really.

Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, Then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, But you must not return to them.

I wonder if Jeremiah thought he needed to "return?" He hadn't gone anywhere. He hadn't fallen into sin.

But his words, though honest, indicated he thought of God as a distant force rather than his familiar friend. He wasn't looking to God for fellowship but only for power, only to give him what he wanted and thought he had earned or at least deserved.

God, for His part, offered to immediately "bring [Jeremiah] back." He'd forgive him, accept him, and they would pick up right where they had left off.

"You shall stand before Me." Was Jeremiah not standing before God? Not really; not in his heart. Not while he was accusing God of being unloving in allowing his troubles to continue.

Think of the incredible privilege it is to stand before God! Is there anything, really, that can compare? Is there any suffering that can take away the wonder of being in the presence of God?

Stop for a moment and remember that your God, your Lord and Savior, understands suffering. He suffered for you - because there was no other way to save you and because that is what His love does.

“Take out the precious from the vile.” It’s a reference to refining precious metals through fire. It’s a reminder that God *can* and *does* use the troubles you encounter to develop Christ in you.

“You shall be as My mouth.” To speak the word of God to men; to speak *forth* and to speak *for* God. Is there any greater message in all the world? It’s worth suffering for at the hands of those who reject it.

“Let them return to you, But you must not return to them.” If you’ve encountered the living God, no matter how difficult your road home to Heaven you are to influence others rather than fall back into their way of thinking.

Jeremiah 15:20 And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; And they will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 15:21 "I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible."

This is a restatement of Jeremiah’s original calling. In case he had forgotten the Lord reminded him that he was in a “fight.” It wasn’t peacetime duty. He wasn’t a recruiter in some cushy office. He was in a war for souls and to represent the glory of God. He was deep behind enemy lines, fighting hand-to-hand.

One of our problems, especially in our mostly affluent Western culture, is we forget we are in a war - a spiritual war. We acknowledge there is spiritual warfare but we tend to live as though it shouldn’t affect us on a personal level unless we sign-up for duty, which we think is voluntary.

It *does* affect us. Stunningly powerful spiritual enemies are marshaled against you. When their attacks occur you can begin to vilify God.

Or you can glorify God. You can reveal His love and His light as you battle back. Your rallying cry, in the midst of the siege, can be, “[My] light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for [me] a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (Second Corinthians 4:17).

If there is a secret, a key, in doing so, it is captured in God’s encouragement, “return to Me.” It demands a certain way of thinking. When it comes to suffering and trouble, we must know in our hearts that God is *against*, not *behind*, all the evil in this world. Instead of trusting our own assessment of circumstances that are too complex to totally fathom, we must determine to remain in the love of God, never doubting His love for us.

How can I possibly think God loves me in the midst of something tragic? All I have to do is take a look at Jesus. As one author put it,

Jesus is the perfect expression of God’s thought, character and will. He is God’s self-definition to us. In Christ God defines and expresses Himself as a God of outrageous love. He is for us, not against us. We are undeserving people with whom He nevertheless is in love.

In practical, everyday, rubber-meets-the-road terms, I cannot explain why, when James and Peter were both arrested in the Book of Acts for preaching Christ, James was beheaded while Peter was miraculously delivered by an angel from prison.

No one can really adequately answer questions like that! I can say that the first century Christians glorified God in both outcomes rather than vilifying Him.

If we begin to look away from Jesus, putting emphasis on our “light afflictions which are but for a moment,” it’s easy to vilify God.

All of us will to say to God, “for Your sake I have suffered rebuke.” It’s how you say it that matters. Don’t vilify God; glorify Him. He loves you. He is love.

We can always, therefore, fix our eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, trusting that He is at all times against suffering and, when it isn’t prevented, glorifying Himself through it.