

When Things Get Worse

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet and sent him to the people of Judah to proclaim His word. However, the Jews hated him. Jeremiah was persecuted, ridiculed, and threatened. The Jews even plotted to kill him:

Jeremiah 11:19: “But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.”

Although Jeremiah was miserable, the wicked people around him were not. They were leading great lives. That really bothered the prophet:

Jeremiah 12:1: “Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?”

Jeremiah thought it was unfair that he, a faithful prophet of God, was suffering so greatly while the wicked people around him were flourishing and happy. So he cried out to God for help.

Did God comfort him? No. Instead God told him that he was living in the *good* times, and that in the future his life was going to get a whole lot worse:

Jeremiah 12:5: “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how

canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

God compared Jeremiah's life to a race. In the past he had been racing against other people who were running on foot, but in the future he would be running against *horses*. In the past he had been suffering during times of peace, but in the future he would live through times of war – and his suffering would be greatly multiplied. In other words, Jeremiah's suffering had only just begun. If he was already miserable now then he *really* wasn't going to like what his future held. That was God's response to his prayer.

Jeremiah's life *really did* get worse. The persecution against him intensified. His family plotted evil against him. The priests beat him and demanded his execution. The king put him in prison even though he had done nothing wrong. He was mocked, despised, and ridiculed – and not a single person in Judah repented at his preaching.

In fact, God actually told Jeremiah that in spite of all of his preaching and all of his suffering, his generation was never going to listen to him:

Jeremiah 7:27: “Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee.”

Jeremiah isn't the only person in those days who cried out to God in pain and was given that same answer. This is what God told Baruch, a faithful man who risked his life to help Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 45:2-5: “Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch: Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to

my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest. Thus shalt thou say unto him, The Lord saith thus; Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.”

God told Baruch that He was going to protect his life and would keep him safe wherever he went. However, that's all Baruch was going to receive. Baruch wasn't going to be given any great blessings.

Why? Because Baruch (and Jeremiah) lived in a time when God was pouring out His wrath upon all the nations of the world. The judgments of God were falling not just upon Judah, but upon the Gentile nations as well. Baruch lived in a time of destruction, not a time of prosperity. The things he wanted in life couldn't be obtained during that time.

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there are different seasons of life. Although we may desire a season of peace and prosperity, there may come a time when it's the season of destruction and pain instead:

Ecclesiastes 3:8: “A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”

Baruch and Jeremiah lived in a time of war, not in a time of peace. Things were bad and they were only going to get worse. That was just their time in history.

There are some people who believe that God has promised them prosperity. They think that one day God will fix all their problems and give them a wonderful and prosperous life in this world – but God never made such a promise. Although Jeremiah was a faithful servant of God, he never got a wonderful and

prosperous life. The apostles didn't either. What Jesus actually promised was that we would have *problems*, not prosperity – but He would be with us through it:

John 16:33: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

This promise doesn't mean that God will one day solve all our problems and give us a great life in this world. The apostle Paul was a faithful servant of God and he was persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, given a thorn in the flesh, and ultimately put to death for his faith. It's true that some people (like Job) really *do* see all their problems solved and die rich and happy, but there are many righteous people whose life is full of suffering and then they die. Jeremiah is just one example.

That's one of the reasons why Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 15:19: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

What makes Christianity worthwhile is that *this life isn't all there is*. We have the hope of a resurrection to come – a resurrection into a body that's incorruptible and immortal:

1 Corinthians 15:52-54: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the

saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

We have the promise of life in a better world where there will be no pain or sorrow or death or sin, but where things will be perfect forever without end:

Revelation 21:1-5: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

That is what makes it all worthwhile.

If you're hoping for a better life in this world then you may be disappointed. There are many people who think that's going to happen, and then become frustrated and angry when it doesn't in spite of all their suffering and prayers. It's possible that one day God may fix your problems – or He may not. Things may never get better in this life (just as they didn't for Jeremiah).

What God has promised us is a better life in the world to come. He's promised us the astounding gift of everlasting life:

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Although we may face many trials in this life, He promised to be with us and to never forsake us:

Hebrews 13:5: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

But those who seek a happy and prosperous life in *this* world may never find it because God never promised it.