

In Preparation for Maundy Thursday *A Gethsemane Life*

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Hebrews 11:39-40

Read: Jeremiah 38:1-28

Jeremiah's forty years of heart-breaking, life-threatening ministry is an inspiring, albeit sobering, reminder to today's believers of costly obedience.

Earlier we said Jeremiah had a Gethsemane mindset. That might have been an understatement; perhaps it would be better to say that he had a Gethsemane life! Jeremiah's forty years of heart-breaking, life-threatening ministry is an inspiring, albeit sobering, reminder to today's believers of costly obedience. Ever true to the word of the Lord, Jeremiah obeyed Yahweh. He got himself ready and stood for four decades, declaring whatever the Lord commanded him to say (1:17). He faced Judah's evil kings, lying prophets, bad priests, plotting relatives, and foreign kings, without giving in and yielding an inch. What the Lord said was true: “Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze wall to stand against the whole land” (1:18). But this stalwart prophet, pastor and poet was a man of deep feelings and a broken heart. He preached judgment with tears: “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people” (9:1). He was bold in public, but he wept in private: “I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive” (13:17).

Because the Lord had withdrawn his blessing, his love and his pity from the people, Jeremiah was ordered to do so as well (16:5). He remained single, refused to attend funerals, rejected hospitality, and showed up at the temple the way Jesus did. Even his loneliness sent a message.

Jeremiah didn't preach three-point sermons, he embodied the word of the Lord in his life and character. He was not the Incarnate One, but he lived an incarnational lifestyle. He was a parable of Jesus 600 years before Jesus.

He embodied the word of the Lord in his life and character.

1. What was the hardest thing for Jeremiah to endure? Was it delivering scathing messages of judgment? Was it the pain of having his people reject the word of the Lord? Was it his betrayal by his own family, the treachery of political leaders, and the deception of false prophets? Was it the physical pain of being beaten or the appearance of being a traitor? Was it bearing insults and reproach for forty years because of the word of the Lord?

2. Jeremiah was called of God to deliver an impossible message (38:1-4). What makes our message from the word of the Lord impossible today?

3. Who does King Zedekiah remind you of during Jesus' time (38:5)?

4. If Jeremiah was born in 645 BC, as some scholars estimate, and if this incident took place in 588 BC, Jeremiah would have been about 57 years old when he was thrown into a cistern, where he “sank down into the mud.” Jeremiah must have thought to himself that his life wasn’t getting any easier. It was an Ethiopian by the name of Ebed-Melech, an official in the royal palace, who took pity on him and appealed to the king. The king ordered Ebed-Melech to “lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.” What is significant about Zedekiah’s order? What was significant about Pilate’s order (Mark 15:9, 26; John 19:19-22)?

5. Ebed-Melech’s concern that Jeremiah might be in danger of starving to death was confirmed by the precaution he took in lifting Jeremiah out of the pit. Do you think that Jeremiah was disappointed with God for letting him stay down in the cistern until he almost died?

6. It is remarkable that after all that had taken place, Zedekiah still sought Jeremiah’s counsel (38:14-27), yet still refused to accept his message. Why did Zedekiah find it easier to trust his fears than to trust in the word of the Lord? He appears more fearful of his political constituency than of the Lord? Who did Jeremiah think was really stuck in the mud (38:22)?

7. What is the key to Gethsemane stamina? Are you able to say as Jesus did, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36)?

At a crucial moment, when the word of the Lord was absolutely clear, Zedekiah, a victim of his own fears, couldn’t depart from his self-trust. Whereas Jeremiah never stopped trusting in the word of the Lord, even when he faced starving to death in the pit.