

PM Jeremiah 20 "Terror on every side"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 August 2026

Preacher: Mr Cameron MacIver

[0:00] Jeremiah chapter 20 is part of the prophecy of Jeremiah and we'll reflect on this chapter this evening as we come to our sermon and especially this prayer.

! Which forms the second half of the chapter. But for now let's hear God's word as we find it in Jeremiah chapter 20.

Now Pashar the priest, the son of Immer, who was the chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. Then Pashar beat Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin gate of the house of the Lord.

The next day when Pashar released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, He said to him, There is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones and I'm weary with holding it in and I cannot.

[2:45] But for I hear many whispering, terror is on every side. Let us denounce him, let us denounce him, say all my close friends, watching for my fall.

Perhaps he'll be deceived and then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him. But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior.

Therefore my persecutors will stumble. They will not overcome me. They will be greatly ashamed for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.

O Lord of hosts who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them. For to you I have committed my cause.

Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of the evil doers. Cursed be the day on which I was born.

[3:48] The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father. A son is born to you, making him very glad.

Let that man be like the cities that the Lord overthrew without pity. Let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, because he did not kill me in the womb.

So my mother would have been my grave and her womb forever great. Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow and spend my days in shame?

This is God's word. Have your Bibles. Let's turn back please to Jeremiah. Chapter 20. And tonight we're considering together the prayer that Jeremiah offers up in this sort of second half of this chapter.

I'm not sure if any of you, I suspect, I think I almost know that at least some of you have read some of the fictional books by Tolkien. And one of them is called The Fellowship of the Ring.

[5:03] It's a book of fiction, of course. But in case you haven't read it, it describes an imaginary race called the hobbits.

Who are a peaceful, peace-loving race of creatures who have lived for a long, long time in a place called the Shire, which is a kind of place of peace and tranquility.

And the only things they ever needed to worry about were who had grown the biggest vegetables or whether it was safe to have silver spoons out when certain relatives came to visit or things like that.

And if you know the story, you'll know that these peace-loving creatures are drawn into this horrible conflict which engulfs the whole of the imaginary world in which they live called Middle Earth.

And the character in the book has this often quoted quote. Frodo says this, I wish it need not have happened in my time.

[6:17] And Gandalf, the other great character in the book, says to him, so do I. And so do all who live to see such times. And the question this evening is, if you could have chosen when you would be born, when would you have chosen, what time and place would you like to have been placed in?

And certainly as we come tonight to consider this prayer of Jeremiah's in Jeremiah chapter 20, we can see that few, if any of us, would choose to have been born in Jeremiah's time and in Jeremiah's place.

Jeremiah lived and ministered in a time and place of what you might call peak unfaithfulness of God's people.

God's people had been heaping up their sins to the limit and they'd consistently ignored and disregarded all of the prophets that the Lord had sent to correct them.

They'd hardened their hearts just as Pharaoh had done before them and they'd gotten now to this point where judgment was unavoidable.

[7:51] and it was a horrible time to minister, a horrible time to be a faithful servant of the Lord.

Jeremiah's been bringing God's word to the people and the leaders of the kingdom of Judah and he's ministering as you probably know just before, immediately prior to its ultimate fall and the carrying of the people off into exile in Babylon.

And like so many of the prophets that we meet in the Old Testament when he is first called he is hesitant and he's a bit of a reluctant prophet you might say.

And like Ezekiel who'd come shortly after him, he was also given sometimes these striking visual elements to his prophecy ways of showing what God's word was communicating through drama through physical objects and so he makes in chapter 27 he makes up a wooden yoke to symbolise the servitude that the people have brought upon themselves.

in chapter 13 he purchases and then buries a linen belt and then digs it up again to show how ruined and spoiled this belt is to show how the relationship between God and his people has been ruined by their consistent unfaithfulness.

[9:35] And just immediately prior to this the events that are referenced at the start of chapter 20 Jeremiah has done one of these dramatic visual demonstrations of God's word he's bought a big clay jar or pot or flask and he's gone and he's delivered this message to the leaders of the people again warning them of the judgment to come and in order to show what this would be like he smashes this big flask I presume it was a big flask to show how irrevocable the judgment that was coming would be how serious and how difficult it would be to repair if you like how it couldn't be repaired and so this is the kind of message that Jeremiah has been given to deliver and he meets with consistent and nearly universal rejection everybody hates the message that he's bringing and now in response to having been faithful to God's instructions to deliver this message as we just read at the start of chapter 20 he spent the night in the stocks whatever that must have meant he somehow had maybe his head and hands restrained all night miserable painful humiliating he's been subject to a beating and not only that but one delivered the instruction of one of the most senior priests in the land and so he's facing this this rejection from almost everybody that he is sent to speak to and it's in that context that he brings this prayer and cries out to the

Lord and that's what we're looking at tonight this prayer that Jeremiah delivers under these circumstances and it's difficult but we're going to take it in three sections if we may the first section is what I'll call the reproach of the gospel from verses 7 through to 10 and then from verses 11 through 13 we'll see something of the triumph of the gospel and then there's this mysterious section at the end which is so difficult and so hard to know what to do with and I will call that section treasures in jars of clay but first of all then the reproach of the gospel you'll remember if you're here this morning many of you were we were reading Galatians chapter 5 and in Galatians 5:11 Paul speaks of the offense of the cross and this is something of what

Jeremiah is experiencing here in being faithful to God's word in seeking to bring the message that God has given him there is a reproach attached to it the task that Jeremiah was given was really difficult it was challenging physically he had to endure patiently these beatings that he received those of you who are familiar with Jeremiah know that he also is thrown into a cistern he's deprived of food at times physically demanding the job of being a prophet in Jeremiah's day but it was also appallingly difficult emotionally see what he says about himself in verse 7 I've become a laughing stock all the day everyone mocks me he's mocked and laughed at for being faithful to God's word it was horribly difficult psychologically people are whispering about him they're saying they're going to denounce him his close friends are ready to betray him as we see here this is a horrible experience and when he cries out when he speaks even the way he delivers his message is a sort of anguished way he says that he's crying out and the message that he has the message itself brings him derision and mockery you see how he says it's a reproach and the reproach and

derision all day long verse 8 and as if that weren't bad enough he also suffers internal temptation doesn't he he speaks about that in verse 9 this temptation to avoid all this reproach by simply not speaking and not delivering

God's word is a real one for him he wants to avoid all of these horrible things and yet he finds he cannot and in verse 10 we have what I've taken as a title for this sermon terror on every side and the scholars tell us that it's an allusion to Psalm 31 verse 13 where the exact same phrase I understand occurs there as David as God's anointed speaks about this experience a terror on every side he speaks of the horror of being in a situation where there's no safe direction in which to face he's faced by his enemies but when he turns to those who should be his friends they are also against him a horrific experience no place of safety no place of trust and so this is

[15 : 53] Jeremiah's experience in total he's sent with a message he's delivered it faithfully but he suffers for it and actually throughout the scriptures that's a pattern that we see again and again and again isn't it it's a pattern which should be preparing us for what will be the ultimate apparent failure the ultimate apparent rejection because a greater than Jeremiah would of course come and he too would face all of these temptations and all of these experiences in his testing in the wilderness he would be tempted as it were to avoid the course of the cross and to hold in as it were God's word as Jeremiah phrases it there avoid the path of the cross by neglecting the task he's been given by God the Father

Jesus too will suffer this horrific experience of betrayal by his friends and family to be accused of all kinds of things and yet Christ too will be the one who brings a message which is ultimately a message of judgment unless you repent you too will perish says Christ and for that message he's mocked and derided as we read of Jeremiah being mocked and derided surely your mind fast forwards to those who would mock the Lord Jesus and say he saved others but let's see if he can save himself as it were if you're the son of God come down from the cross and we'll believe in you mocked and derided and so

Jeremiah's mocked and derided for being faithful but it's just a foreshadowing of what Christ would experience and for those of us who are united to Christ it is what we too can expect central to what we do here in this building when we meet to worship and seek to be faithful to God's word is what we might call the offence of the cross people will think it's something to be mocked something to be ridiculed because it seems like foolishness to all whose eyes have not been opened by the Holy Spirit and just like Jeremiah we as Christians face that temptation to hold in to avoid being mocked and ridiculed by not being proclaiming the full word of the Lord as it were that's a temptation for all of us and we should be honest about it and there is a sense in which it is shameful because our sin is shameful in fact I'll go as far as to say if there's a sin that you don't feel ashamed of and embarrassed about to confess in front of the church then there's a good chance that's not the main sin in your life that needs to be repented of because sin is shameful sin is horrible ugly filthy and so much so that only the death of the son of

God on a cross could atone for it so a couple of points of application we've touched on them already for this section if as a congregation we are faithful to the gospel message then we can expect to be derided expect to be mocked to be made a laughing stock of but what we see here is that we might be braced for that when it comes from those who are our enemies so to speak but what if it comes from within what if it comes from our close friends it's happened to Jeremiah it happened to David it happened to Christ and secondly in application have we really grasped what we're calling the offense of the cross when we speak to others about what it really means to be a

Christian are you able to communicate something of what that involves the actual sense of shame and guilt about our own sin so serious that only the real red blood of the son of God being spilled and dripping down as it were a real wood cross could atone for that sin nothing less valuable could atone only all of this suffering and rejection including betrayal by his closest friends and death on a cross could atone for my sin if you understand this even a little bit you'll know that there's a sense in which there are no words for it and yet it's our job to try to communicate that to those around us who need to hear the gospel so that's that's the the reproach in verses 7 to 10 but then we come to a different note a change of tone verses 11 to 13 there's something here of a triumph the triumph of the gospel the Lord is with me as a dread warrior says

[22 : 27] Jeremiah the context here is one of conflict and that's certainly a theme isn't it throughout scripture and here we see the Lord with Jeremiah as a dread warrior to be in a conflict but to have with you one before whom no one can stand let me read a few words from Revelation 19 11 then I

saw heaven opened and behold a white horse the one sitting on it is called faithful and true and in righteousness he judges and makes war his eyes are like flame of fire and on his head are many diadems and he has a name written that no one knows but himself he's clothed in a robe dipped in blood and the name by which he is called is the word of

God and the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen white and pure were following him on white horses from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron he'll tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the almighty on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written king of kings and lord of lords the lord is with me as a dread warrior christ is described in those verses in revelation as the one who rides out to victory with the armies of heaven behind him and no one can stand against that and we see that don't we in psalm 2 we see this description of the nations conspiring against the lord's anointed and the lord laughs and in all sorts of places in scripture like daniel we see this theme of the world and the governments of the world in various forms rising up and conspiring against the lord's anointed but the outcome is certain there is no one who can stand against this king of kings who will conquer all and you'll see in verse 11 at the end there the eternal dimension to the outcome of this conflict and this appeal that

Jeremiah makes the perfect justice of God for vindication and the outcome of this conflict is rejoicing it's praise and singing and worship that focuses on the redemption of the needy of the helpless and this is something of the victory of the gospel it's something that's spoken of here has been so certain that it's already happened it's already been achieved and that's what the gospel is a victory that's already been won and so we've seen the reproach of the gospel but we see that Jeremiah even as he's so affected by this he's able to turn to see what the Lord has revealed to him about the final outcome and to sing and to worship and to praise and rejoice that though things may be difficult that he has a certain and sure hope of final victory through the gospel gospel what are the applications from this well in verses 11 in particular we see this language of conflict and throughout the bible we have that as a theme the idea of spiritual warfare spiritual conflict we know about the armour of

God that we need to put on in order to engage in this conflict but do we really see our lives as Christians and your life together as a congregation do we really see it as a conflict with eternal consequences for the combatants as it were do we really see it as a conflict in which we must strive and as it were be prepared to sweat and to fight spiritually for it and again we've touched on this and perhaps it's an obvious application but Jeremiah speaks of this battle as one that's already won the victory is already certain and again this is a question for us as a congregation do we regard the outcome of the spiritual conflict in which we strive as being one where the outcome is certain and victory is assured well we've seen then the reports of the gospel and the triumph of the gospel and I'll be honest with you when I was preparing to preach on this passage I was drawn to it but I struggled to know what to make of verses 14 to 18 and I was tempted believe it or not I thought well maybe I could deal with that earlier in the sermon and then come and talk about victory and rejoicing and end on a high note because that's what we would normally want to do isn't it we would normally want to leave this place with a message of encouragement a message of hope but to be faithful to the word I feel I have to take it as it comes to us here and this prayer ends with these words which have the commentators perplexed and confused and almost embarrassed because how are we to deal with what he says in these verses he's poured out his lament to the [29:31] Lord in his prayer he's done everything right hasn't he this is what we're to do we're to come to the Lord and pour out our soul and bare our soul as it were to the Lord and he's done that and he seems to have as he's done that he seems to have reminded himself that the Lord is with him as a dread warrior and that the end of this is going to be singing and praise and deliverance and so why why does this prayer crash at the end it feels as though someone should have taken Jeremiah's pen away at the end of verse 13 and say well that will do but no he goes on with his prayer in this way and it's strange it's a sour sort of discordant note doesn't it those of you who know your Bibles well

I'm sure when we were reading this would have been reminded of Job the other ancient prophet who famously cursed the day he was born because of the great weight of suffering that he had to endure and as we go through scripture we find a few people who speak to the Lord in prayer in ways that make us uncomfortable and it seems as though they speak out of turn to the Lord in their prayers I myself thought of Moses for example in Exodus 5 he says you haven't rescued your

people at all it's a bit close to the bone it's a bit it doesn't seem right to us so what are we to make of these curses well scripture interprets scripture and when we find something difficult in scripture we're to look to other plainer passages of scripture for light and when we do that

I think the very least that we can say is that this is certainly not a license for us to speak in this way even when we experience suffering and just as we need care when we read Job and any other parts of scripture we need to weigh what we find in the light of other passages in the Bible and this passage is a wee bit of a mystery and it's difficult to know what to make of it and so how can we apply it to our lives well the first application is to say that all of us even the most faithful even the most strong close to the Lord Christians are flawed sinners and we must always remember that there is only one who is perfect all of the other characters in the

Bible are flawed sinners so that's the first thing to bear in mind but secondly perhaps this is included because the Lord would rather I think that we are honest with him in prayer about how we feel even when this leads to us acknowledging things that are wrong in our own hearts it is better to be honest than to be covering up as it were how we really feel in prayer so bear that in mind thirdly the torment that Jeremiah experienced was because of the spiritual darkness of his day he was so tormented by the spiritual darkness of his day that he cursed the day he was born and cursed the man who brought this happy news to his father the question for us is does the spiritual darkness of your day affect your emotions at all fourthly

God overlooks all kinds of things in our prayers all the time Romans 8 28 6 speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in helping us in our prayers and in Revelation we see that our prayers are described as a fragrant offering of incense arising before the Lord because of the work of the Holy Spirit and this is for our encouragement God overlooks these things in our prayers and the Holy Spirit helps us and our prayers are presented in a way that is pleasing to God even when on the way up as it were they contain things that are not right so let's rejoice as I say fourthly that God overlooks sin in our prayers and fifthly and finally as we close let's go back to

[35 : 33] Frodo and Gandalf for a minute he wished it couldn't have happened in his day could have happened some other time as we read these words consider that Jeremiah may well have wished he was born in your day when the light of the gospel shines so clearly from every part of the new testament and back into the old testament to reflect back out the glorious gospel message that we've been given the fulfillment of this prophecy of the rejection that he experienced the full and final fulfillment of all of that what right have we to complain about the day we were born you and

I have been born in a time and place where the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ shines brightly into the heart of poor sinners like me and I hope like you curse be the day I was born on which I was born surely not surely not no blessed be the day each of us were born we're going to close singing from psalm 42 it's just one psalm on from where we were just a minute ago sorry away