

Jeremiah 12:5

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Preacher: Rev George MacAskill

- [0 : 0 0] I'm seeking the Lord's blessing. Let us turn now to a portion of scripture that we read in the prophecy of Jeremiah and chapter 12. And we'll read at verse 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 trustest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?
- Over time we have looked at parts of this prophecy up to chapter 10. And today we come to a new section of the prophecy, because Jeremiah chapter 11 to 20 are traditionally known as the confessions.
- In chapter 2 to 10, the person of Jeremiah remains fairly much in the shadows. But now he comes fairly forward, and we become aware of his own inner sufferings.
- What we have in chapter 11 to 20, and what we have here today before us, are the feelings of a servant of the Lord, who expresses his grief and bewilderment at the work that has been assigned to him, of bringing a hard message to an unresponsive and even hostile people.
- [1 : 5 2] You will recall that after the reign of Solomon, when his son came to the throne, that the kingdom of Israel was divided into two.
- There were the ten tribes known as the Northern Kingdom, and they set up Samaria as their capital.
- And the two tribes that remained faithful to the dynasty of David, they came to be known as Judah, the Southern Kingdom.
- Two tribes, the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. But Judah being the largest tribe, the nation took its name from Judah.
- So now we have Israel and we have Judah. We have the ten tribes and the two tribes. Now, idolatry began in Israel very early, and the Lord was warning them that he would bring them to captivity, that he would set another nation who would overcome them and take them away.
- [3 : 1 6] And that did happen. But unfortunately, Judah followed the example of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and they themselves fell into idolatry.
- And so God sent them prophets to warn them, to ask them to repent of their sins, to obey his word.
- And Jeremiah was one of those prophets. But the people were unresponsive to the warnings that they received from the prophets.
- And eventually, God did bring them into captivity. They went into the captivity of Babylon, where they remained for 70 years.
- And at the end of 70 years, the Lord made provision for them, through a heathen king, actually, who gave them permission to return back to the land from which they had been taken into captivity.

[4 : 25] And some returned, and they began to build the temple and build Jerusalem, as the Bible tells us.

So that is sort of the background we have to the prophecy of Jeremiah. He is warning the nation of Judah that unless they repent, that they also are going to be punished, that the Lord is going to bring them into captivity.

And here, however, as we come here to the end of chapter 11, we find that the Lord gives Jeremiah a certain revelation.

And the Lord hath given me knowledge of it, and I know it. Then thou showest me their doings. And it goes on, and the revelation is that his enemies, that's the enemies of Jeremiah, that they are seeking to kill him.

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.

[5 : 51] They were not only seeking his life, but they were determined that there would be no trace left of him.

They wanted to destroy the tree and its fruit. In other words, they wanted to kill him before he would have any children, so that there would be no offspring from Jeremiah.

Now, what time that this plot against Jeremiah's life took place is uncertain. We know that Jeremiah prophesied at the time of King Josiah, and it could be at the time of Josiah's reformation.

During the reign of King Josiah, the book of the law was found in the temple, and after it had been read, some reformation took place in the nation.

It was not total reformation, because the life of Josiah was cut short. He died very early, and the reformation, of course, halted, and the little reformation that there was disappeared, and the people went back to their formal ways.

[7 : 19] But if Jeremiah was a supporter of this reform, which involved the suppression of shrines throughout Judah, then this might have aroused strong feelings among the people.

Those plotting against him were men of Antioch, the people of his own birthplace. In chapter 12, we read, For even thy brethren and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee.

Yea, they have called a multitude after thee. Believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee. So, Jeremiah was a despised and a rejected servant of the Lord, a despised and rejected prophet, even by those of his own hometown, and those of his own household.

He was certainly not a popular servant of the Lord. Now, it may surprise us, or it may not even surprise us, that the people of his own hometown and household were against him.

That is, the people of Antioch. Because that was a very religious town. It was the town of priests, and Jeremiah had a lot to say about the religious life of his own hometown, and he had a lot to say about the priesthood.

[8 : 54] He often criticised the priests who practised greed for their own gain, and who also gave false messages, saying peace when there was no peace.

Gave false messages, deceiving the people. And therefore, because he spoke out against all those things, Jeremiah was not popular.

They were saying, Prophecy not in the name of the Lord, that thou die not by our hand.

The people were rejecting both the messenger and the message. Jeremiah came with the word of the Lord, and this upset the people, for they were not prepared to receive the word of the Lord.

They were not prepared to receive the warning that God was giving them. Because they were living very comfortable lives. And Jeremiah's preaching of sin and repentance that upset them.

[10 : 05] And that is always true, where there is a faithful preaching of the word of God. It upsets people, because it calls people to account.

And the response very often is to attack the word and the messenger. And as it was in Jeremiah's day, so it is down to the present day, and shall be to the end of time.

Where there is a faithful preaching of the word of God, people are going to get upset, and the response of these people will be to attack the word of God and its messenger.

Jesus told his disciples, not to be surprised, he said, that in this world, you will have tribulation.

I am sending you, he says, a sheep among wolves. We are not exempt from the ridicule and the antagonism that the world pours upon the word of God.

[11 : 18] However, Jeremiah was committed to his calling and committed to his God. And he continued to preach, placing himself under God's protection.

But O Lord of hosts, that judge us righteously, that tries the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them, for unto thee have I revealed my cause.

For unto thee have I revealed my cause. Or, for unto thee I have committed the cause. He committed his cause to the Lord.

Now, you may be surprised by certain words that Jeremiah said, as he committed his cause to the Lord, especially these words, let me see thy vengeance on them.

Well, vengeance here does not refer to Jeremiah's own feelings of vindictiveness. What Jeremiah is seeking here is the Lord's vindication of his messenger.

[12 : 30] Jeremiah knew, as Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, vengeance is mine and I will repay, saith the Lord. what Jeremiah is seeking here is that the Lord would acknowledge him and take due action against those who are prepared to conspire against him.

You see, sin must be punished and it is a great sin to reject the word of God and that is exactly what these people were doing.

Their response to the word delivered by God's prophet Jeremiah was, shut up or die. That's really what they were saying to Jeremiah.

Shut up or die. A total rejection of God's word. Of God's call to them for repentance.

God revealed to Jeremiah what he was going to do with the people of his own hometown and the earth. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will punish them.

[13 : 45] The young men shall die by the sword. Their sons and their daughters shall die by famine and there shall be no remnant for them. For I will bring evil upon the men of Antioch even the year of their visitation.

God's word makes it clear to me and you that unless we hit his call to repentance repentance, then our sin must be punished.

This is a reminder to us that God will judge every sin. We may try to hide our sins but our conscience reminds us that we cannot hide them from God.

God sees what you do. He always does. Paul says to the Romans God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

He will bring every deed unto judgment including every hidden thing whether it be good or evil. And that is why we must throw ourselves upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for sinners.

[15 : 06] If we do not ask for God's mercy based on the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ then we will join the men of Antioch in receiving God's eternal condemnation.

Now one would think that Jeremiah would end his case there. But it goes on in chapter 12 and he begins to ask more questions.

Righteous art thou O Lord when I plead with thee. Yea let me talk with thee of thy judgments. And then he begins to ask questions.

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very dreadfully?

Now Jeremiah knew that God would defend his cause and that God is a righteous judge who will always punish sin. But Jeremiah here wanted to have a word with the Lord and so he says wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?

[16 : 31] Wherefore are they all they happy that deal very treacherously? And this may be a very common question.

Maybe even there is contained in it a bit of criticism that people may have with the Lord.

In other words what Jeremiah is really asking is why do good things happen to bad people? Does this show that God is not in control?

Why does the wicked prosper? while the one who is loyal to the Lord may be suffering? Now Jeremiah here is not questioning the sovereignty of God for he says thou hast planted them yea they have taken root they grow yea they bring forth fruit.

It is you who have planted them they are rooted and they are bringing forth fruit they are successful. Now although he is not questioning the sovereignty of God he is questioning God's goodness to the wicked to the way that those who sow wickedness who live in wickedness seems to be successful and prospering in the world.

[18 : 14] He is somewhat perplexed he finds it difficult to reconcile the success that the wicked enjoy with his belief in the goodness of God.

Jeremiah is in the similar straits to that psalm that we sung at the beginning of our service this morning Psalm 73 where the psalmist questioned the prosperity of the wicked.

He says truly God is good to Israel even to such as are of a clean heart but as for me he says my feet were almost gone my steps had well nigh slipped for I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked for there are no bands in their death but their strength is firm they are not in trouble as other men neither are they plagued like other men and he keeps on complaining until he went to the temple to worship and he remembered there that the wicked are destined for destruction until I went into the sanctuary of God then understood either end surely thou did set them in slippery places thou castest them down into destruction how are they brought into desolation as in a moment they are utterly consumed with terrors in in the gospels we have the parable of the wheat and the tares and they're growing up together in

Matthew 13 the servants said unto him wilt thou then that we go and gather them up but he said nay lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them let both grow together until the harvest and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them but gather the wheat into my barn the wicked prosper the sun shines on them as it is on the righteous the rain pours down on them the same as the righteous they prosper well they are successful God is good to them but you know Paul writing to the Romans reminds us he says despises thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering you see if we see their success and their prospering of the wicked in that light that they are the recipients of the goodness and forbearance and long suffering of

God and Paul goes on and he says not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance the goodness of God should lead us to repentance but what generally happens is as Paul reminds us man hardens his heart against the goodness the forbearance and the long suffering of God but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treacherous up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds Jeremiah goes on and he says regarding those people thou art near in their mouth and far from their reins or it could be put like this you are near in their mouth and far from their heart they profess to be believers

[22 : 33] God's name is always upon their lips but God is far from their hearts now this was a very common complaint that God brought to the people of Israel and Judah that they were using his name upon their lips but that their heart was far from him you see God looks upon the heart where our treasure is there our heart will be also God looks inwardly he he looks upon the heart he such as the heart he knows our motives he knows our thoughts and when we come to worship it is important that we do not merely pay a lip service to

God that which is outward and external but when we come to worship that we bring our heart to our worship that which is inward when they spoke they were very pious but it did not correspond to their inner thinking where God was not really recognised at all they just wanted what was external they wanted to be seen of others but God was not in their thoughts at all the prophet Joel says rend your heart and not your garments and turn into the Lord your God all their talk about God had not impinged on their daily living they spoke much about God but in their daily life they forgot

God and so what Jeremiah is doing here is contrasting his own situation with that of the wicked but Jeremiah's comfort was this as he says that the Lord knew about his heart but thou O Lord knowest me thou hast seen me and tried mine heart towards thee does the searching of the Lord does it make you afraid well you know the psalmist in Psalm 139 said search me O God and know my heart try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting you see the psalmist was not pleased with just his own searching of his heart he wanted the

Lord to search his heart and if there was any wicked way in his heart that the Lord would deal with that and lead him in a way everlasting now in all this questioning that Jeremiah is doing with the Lord wherefore does the way of the wicked prosper wherefore are they all happy that deal very treacherously we see that God did not give Jeremiah a direct answer at all instead actually he posed a few questions of his own in verse 5 God says God says to him if you canst contend with horses and if in the land of peace wherein thou trustest they wear thee then how will thou do in the swelling of Jordan

God has done and God does not directly answer the questions that have been posed by the prophets regarding the wicked and the hard times endured by those who are loyal to the Lord he reminds us that those who are granted the privilege of serving the Lord must do so without having revealed to them all the counsels of the Lord. Often they must live with perplexing problems and perhaps with open opposition. There are many questions that we have for which the Lord has not revealed to us an answer. And that is the way that Jeremiah is here. He has asked questions and the Lord has directly answered and revealed to him an answer to his questions. What he is saying to him is to trust in him, to trust in the Lord. And when we have perplexing questions and when we may face ridicule and opposition and we may not quite understand, well why is this happening to me and I look upon the wicked world and they're prospering and successful and they have none of these trials and hardships that I have? Well what we have to do is trust in the Lord. He doesn't always reveal his total and complete counsel to us. But we must trust in him. You see the thought here is really not like the one that Paul exhorts the Corinthians when he says there have no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able but will with a temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it. What we are called to do is to maintain our obedience to God despite the puzzles and the circumstances of life that sometimes confronts us and leaves us so perplexed.

[30 : 44] Notwithstanding their lack of comprehension they are to struggle to remain faithful, to rely on the provision of the one who has promised his presence would be with them and as it was for them so it is for me and you. Despite our lack of comprehension on what we may be going through we are to struggle to remain faithful to God and rely on the provision on his provision who has said that his presence is always with his people.

in Hebrews chapter 12 we read these words and he says that is the grace that has said that the grace that is set before us.

looking into Jesus the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross him endured the cross despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God and he goes on and he says for consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds ye have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin the writer there to the Hebrews is asking us that when we are disheartened by the hardships that confronts us by perhaps the ridicule and the way that the world treats us what we receive from men and when we may be afraid as we may anticipate the hard times that may yet attend our profession our Christian profession what the writer to the Hebrews says is consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself as well as looking into Jesus in the race in the Christian race as well as looking into Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith we are to consider him in his steadfastness under such hard and continuous ridicule and persecution he is calling us to draw an analogy between the sufferings of Jesus Christ and our sufferings look upon your sufferings in the light of the sufferings of Christ consider who he was consider the place that he took consider the gross injustice that he met with the intensity of his trials the intensity of his sufferings at the hands of men and yet consider also his meekness his patience with which he bore all that what are our trials and sufferings compared with his agonies the particular sufferings pointed out there by the writer to the Hebrews is the contradiction of sinners that Jesus encountered he was opposed by his own people if Jeremiah was opposed by his own people by those of his hometown then that was also true of Jesus Christ he was opposed by his own people according to the flesh he came unto his own and his own did not receive him the very ones to whom he ministered in his grace in his love and in his mercy they opposed him he was spat upon he was buffeted he was mocked he was scourged so that his back was like a ploughed field they condemned him to a criminal's death they told him to depart from their coasts to depart out of their districts to depart out of their villages they didn't want him and eventually they nailed him to the cross

Christ felt that contradiction the contradiction of sinners for he was the man of sorrows unacquainted with grief at the end of Psalm 69 there he says reproach that reproach broke his heart nevertheless he did not turn aside from the path of his duty he did not abandon his mission and that's really and that's really something like what he is saying here to Jeremiah to keep going to be steadfast in his duty and in his mission for us in the New Testament we have the example of Christ who never in spite of all that he suffered he never turned aside from the path of his duty he did not abandon his mercy if you feel my friend that your heart loved his heart then look away to the cup that Jesus drank if you as a Christian today saying well my Lord is hard then look to the cup that Jesus drank on your behalf here is the antidote against weariness in this world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer he says

I have overcome the world so that when we become weary on the way and grow faint at heart because there seems to be no end to the trials and to the sufferings and to the ridicule and the mocking that we must endure let us then consider Jesus who suffered uncomplainedly the hostility of those who were around and we never complained what did Jesus do well according to Peter he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously and that's really what Jeremiah had to do there were things he couldn't understand there were perplexing questions much confusion but he had to commit himself to God who judgeth righteously and that's what

[38 : 04] Jesus did in the midst of all the sufferings and the ridicule and mocking that he received from the world from those around him even from the people of his own hometown he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously and that's what I and you have also to do commit ourselves to him to him that judgeth righteously may the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray