

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge  
Sermon- Jeremiah 20:7-13  
Sunday, June 25, 2017

### Doing the Lord's work is hard

1. Let me tell you the story of a missionary. We will call this missionary Dante. Dante was a wealthy man from a prominent family in England. He came from a long line of nobles who had served the monarchy, but Dante felt a calling from the Lord.
2. Following this call, Dante used his wealth and position to raise money and support from among the nobles in England in order to bring the good news to an island of cannibals off the southwestern coast of Australia. The nobles all praised him, praised God, and willingly provided whatever was needed for the trip, including boats, crew, and supplies to last several years.
3. When Dante arrived at the island, the message of the gospel that he preached was so powerful that upon hearing it, the cannibals immediately repented, gave up their pagan and cannibal ways, and sat at Dante's feet wanting to learn more about this Jesus. Dante prospered with these people, eventually discipling them enough that the elders of the local tribes were able to run their own churches and even Christian schools and a seminary.
4. After a decade of this work, Dante returned to England having not lost a single member of his crew and was greeted by the King and the nobles with a parade and a great feast in his honor, all dedicated to the glory of God.
5. Are any of you familiar with this story of St. Dante of Galand? No? That's because I completely made it up. In fact, I have never heard a true story anything like this. Maybe if there were some, more people would be willing to serve the Lord. As it is, doing the Lord's work is hard. Our faithfulness and obedience to him is met with faithfulness and protection from him; but that doesn't necessarily play out by making our earthly lives easier. In fact, the protection is general protection for our souls.
6. The lives of the prophets and apostles- and of Jesus himself- testify to this. As we look at our passage from Jeremiah 20, what we see is a prophet who is distraught because of the great affliction he has suffered for taking the word of the Lord to the people of Judah.
7. Immediately preceding this rant, in the first six verses, Jeremiah had preached of the coming destruction to Judah if they didn't repent. A leader of the temple arrested him, put him in stocks, and prophesied against him. This wasn't the first, nor the last time that he suffered for doing the work of the kingdom. He kept doing the work, but he hit a breaking point.
  - a. "O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me." (v. 7)
  - b. Jeremiah cries out that God has misled him, given him too hard of a task, hasn't protected him. As he goes on through his rant, he talks about how his own close friends hope for his downfall. They hope that one of his prophecies will fail because that would show him to be a false prophet- something to keep in mind when you hear people "prophesying" today.
8. These words might be shocking to hear coming from the mouth of a prophet. In a minute, we will look at even worse complaints that he made. What is important right now is to see that serving God isn't a call to an easy life. The bible never promises such a thing.

The examples we have are of the people of God being persecuted in both the OT and the NT. The promises of Jesus are that they (the world) will hate us because they hate him. He says that families will turn against each other. Many of the NT epistles were written from prison- where the author was imprisoned for doing God's work.

9. Much as we all wish that serving God was like the fiction tale of St. Dante of Galand, the reality is, it is often much more like that of the Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet. I don't know why it has to be that way. What I do know is that we can't fail to do the work of the kingdom just because it is hard.
10. I love Jeremiah. He is my favorite character, and my favorite book of the bible. I understand him. This very prayer that he cries out reminds me of what I have gone through recently. He is also the inspiration for why I couldn't walk away.
  - a. Jeremiah says that even when he tries to keep silent and not share God's word, it comes bursting forth from him. He can't help it. I want to be like that. I want to be able to look at my own suffering and realize that it could never stop me from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### God can handle our concerns and complaints

1. There is something else I want you to take from this passage though. In order to do that, I think we should read a little further. Our reading leaves off with vs. 13, where Jeremiah is praising God. However, vs. 14-18 shows that his praise for God didn't change his mind about his circumstances.
  - a. Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! <sup>15</sup> Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, "A son is born to you," making him very glad. <sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. <sup>18</sup> Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?
2. Wow! Imagine saying, "This is the word of the Lord," and, "Thanks be to God," after that.
3. Here's the thing, God can handle it. God can handle our complaints. We might be afraid to talk to God this way- and to some extent, we need to make sure to be reverent- but God already knows what's in our hearts. He knows how hard the tasks are that he calls us to. He is a big God, and he is capable of handling our complaints and concerns.
4. Notice something else, though. This is only the end of chapter 20, and this book is 50 chapters long. Jeremiah took some time occasionally to lament his situation; but he kept on doing the work faithfully, even after they tried to kill him.
5. Likewise, we are called to do hard things. We are called to serve God and this same world which hates God and means us harm. It shouldn't be an option to be unfaithful to God just because it is difficult. Our God loves us so much, has given us so much in his Son, Jesus Christ, that we should be willing to do all the hard things necessary to share him with the world.
  - a. And when it gets hard, don't be afraid to tell God about it in prayer. He can handle it, he can heal it, and he can redeem it, just as he has redeemed us.