

**Jeremiah 20: 7-18; “As a Dread Champion”, Sermon # 22 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 20th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

If we ask the question of ourselves this morning, “What is a Christian”, what would be your answer? I suppose most people would answer: They are a person who has placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their soul so that they might glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And you would be right. But believing in Jesus for the salvation of your soul introduces you into a relationship with God in which you are being transformed, or made over, into the image of the One who saved you. The very purpose of your existence is to be transformed. You will be changed by the powerful exercise of God’s Holy Spirit who takes the Word that is preached to you, and then in accordance with the truth of the Bible, He providentially orders the circumstances of your life so that you will learn the reality of what it means to become more like Christ. This is God’s very practical purpose, to apply His word to our lives so that we are transformed as a Christian. The Lord Himself is with you as a believer in Jesus Christ. The Lord will never fail you, nor forsake you. But there are certain powerful experiences which the Lord will bring into your life which will radically impact what may be a casual view of what you think that it means to be a Christian, or what it means to be a faithful minister of Christ Jesus.

Jeremiah’s experiences, I believe, will go a long way to show us how God makes us over into the image of His Son when once we have been converted. The truth that I bring before you this morning flows to us from verse 11 where Jeremiah says: “But the Lord is with me as a mighty, awesome One.” (“As a Dread Champion”, it says in the New American Standard version) And so the central truth that I want you to bring away with you from this text today is this: The Lord Himself is with me as a Christian when I experience the most overwhelming difficulties and experiences of my life. He is with me in order to change me, to make me over into the image of His dear Son. I want us to look at 4 of these powerful transforming experiences in order that we might rejoice in the strength and wisdom of our God.

1st – The experience of the Word of God making me a reproach and derision.

The example we are considering is Jeremiah. He was an Old Testament saint and a prophet. And he was living in a very difficult time period in Israel’s history. He was called to faithfully preach to Judah and Jerusalem the truth of their doom if they did not repent. He had to pronounce judgments upon those disobedient people; many of whom, did not want to hear what he had to say. You should understand that Jeremiah had not taken up the prophetic ministry because he wanted to, but because God had called him to it. He didn’t think he could do the work because he was just a youth, and he was inexperienced. This he conveyed to the Lord in Chapter 1, verses 4-10, and 16-19. But the Lord would teach Jeremiah faithfulness in his ministry. I want you to realize, dear Christian, that when God calls you to Himself, when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, that He also calls you to bear the reproach and derision of those around you who do not know God, and do not want to see you beginning to walk with Christ according to His word the Bible. Reproach and derision are people’s making fun of you. They are speaking against you for being so weak and foolish for thinking that you needed to be converted to Christ; and that now you have a desire to follow Christ, and to do things according to the truth of the Bible. I am saying that this is something that the Lord would teach all who would follow Him; to bear reproach and derision.

To reproach someone is to lay a criticism at another person’s doorstep for their beliefs or actions, a criticism which would cause them to be seen by all, as a person who should be shunned, disapproved, disqualified, or rejected. To deride is to ridicule or mock or to laugh at a

person with scorn, because you think that they are very foolish or stupid. Christians are sometimes called to bear this for the sake of the truth. There are many persons in this world that do not want to believe that God's word is true, and so they will attempt in many ways to stop the mouth of those preaching and speaking the word of God. Jeremiah had been trying to do good to these people and he would be sincerely faithful to God. But listen to what he says of himself in verse 7. "I am in derision daily." "Everyone mocks me." Why was this? Verse 8 says: "Because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily." Jeremiah cried out when he spoke. He cried out against the sins of the people; he warned of the impending judgment. He preached repentance. He was very earnest and serious about preaching the truth of God's word. And he found, even as each of us will find, who believe in Jesus, that hard-hearted people will do everything they can to reproach and deride those who hold fast and hold forth the revelation of the word of God. Sinful men will reproach God Himself for having permitted sin to enter the world. And then they will accuse Him of hatred when He judges their sins in particular. They look at sin as God's fault and not theirs; as though God had created them sinners, which He did not.

Sinful people will make up their own truth about God and then they will reproach Him and His people for not accepting it. This is problem in our own country at this time. Sinful people have made up their own religion of acceptance of sin, and the toleration of sinners, and they will accuse God's dear people of being bigoted and unloving because they refuse to accept people in their sins. This reproach and derision in God's hands, however, will become the very means of sanctifying you and making you more like Christ, dear Christian. God's object in ordaining these things is to make you more like Jesus. Look with me over at Psalm 69, verses 7-9 at an example of this. These are words spoken by David, not only of himself, but also prophetically of His Lord. Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face." "I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children; because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. Listen also to verses 19 and 20. "You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; My adversaries are all before You." "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there is none; and for comforters, but I found none."

How was the Lord Jesus reproached? Well, Jesus was reproached when He took a whip of cords and drove the moneychangers from the temple courtyard. John 2: 14-21. He did this because of His zeal for the house of God. The Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days? "But He was speaking of the temple of His body." They reproached Jesus with this statement of His, that He had the power to do this great thing of laying down His life and taking it up again, for the sake of all of God's people. In Matthew 27: 39 and 40 it says that "those who passed by Jesus on the cross blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself!" "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." But this was nothing but a reproach from men who did not understand our Lord's mission and His goal, to redeem a people for God's own possession.

How will reproach come to us, as Christians? Reproach will come to us when we are zealous in reproofing sin, and when we are zealous for God's pure worship. It will come when we identify Jesus as the Son of God, and the only way that sinful people may come to God without being reproached for their sins; without being condemned for their sins and cast away from God's presence. Reproach will come when, in love for people's souls around us, we cannot deliver ourselves from their reproach; we must speak the truth. It will come when we will not

save ourselves from their reproach and their derision. The world and self-righteous people will always place self above everything else.

2nd – The experience of the word of God becoming like a a burning fire in your heart.

When we experience reproach, our reaction as a Christian is often like Jeremiah's. Verse 9 – "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.'" But the powerful presence of Christ's Spirit working in our hearts will not let us act like this indefinitely. 1st John 1: 4 – "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." God's word in Jeremiah's life was a fire in his heart – a burning fire shut up in his bones. When Jesus Christ comes into the life of a person, that person is baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. John the Baptist baptized people with water unto repentance, but Jesus baptized people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. John who was a burning and a shining light as a minister, said to Jesus – "You come to me to be baptized, but I have need to be baptized by You." Matthew Poole says: "Jesus Christ was already baptized with a more excellent baptism than John could administer to him, for God gave Him the Spirit without measure."

What we must have in men who preach the gospel, what we must have in the hearts of all Christians, is this – A holy fire in the bones; this working of the Spirit in our hearts, like a fire. We must ask ourselves whether we may be quenching the fiery operations of God's Spirit, or whether our hearts are burning within us as the Scriptures are opened and explained to us? Is there a burning desire to tell others of what Christ has done for you? Does the tongue of flame (so to speak) rest upon you as you share the gospel with others, as it did upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost? In Isaiah 4: 4 it says: "When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mt. Zion and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night." "For over all the glory will be a covering." To apply this to New Covenant times, and to ourselves, we need to see that the filth of our iniquity will only be washed away when we experience the burning of shame, and come to realize a holy indignation against sin being aroused within us by the ministry of the Spirit. Then we will be revived. Then we will be led, then we will find God our strength. Then we will witness, then we will pray. Then we will rejoice and be glad! Jeremiah could not quit the ministry because he had fire in his bones.

3rd – The experience of triumph over all of your enemies by the powerful presence of God.

Since Jeremiah would be faithful to God in speaking His word, since he would not stop speaking for any man, he hears mocking on every side. He sees people reporting him on every hand, watching for him to stumble. Perhaps, they thought, he could be enticed away from his speaking judgment to Jerusalem. Perhaps the false prophets and the deceived leaders think that they can prevail. But the Lord is with me, Jeremiah says, "as a Dread Champion". This has always been the strength of God's people in times of persecution. The Lord is with me. Therefore my persecutors shall not prevail. They will stumble, they will be greatly ashamed. Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten. This is the way that it is for us, Christ's Church. He is the Dread Champion who has overcome and will overcome all our enemies. He must reign until all His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. We will only experience this triumph when our faith is unmoved from Christ Himself.

1st John 5: 4 says: "This is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith." "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world." "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Listen also to Hebrews chapter 10, verses 32 and following: "But you recall the former days in which after you were illumined, you endured a

great struggle with sufferings, partly while you were made a spectacle, both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your good, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.” “Therefore do not cast away your confidence which has great reward.” Let me ask you, dear Christian, whether you are experiencing triumph, the triumph of Christ in your experience, as you go through the various trials and difficulties in your life?

Psalm 92, verse 1 says: “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night, on an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound.” “For You Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands.” John Gill says: “**For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work**,.... Either of creation, which work is mentioned in the precept of the Sabbath, as an argument for it; and therefore a very proper work to be remembered and observed on that day; or of providence, which in general extends to all men, but especially to them that believe; or of the work of redemption wrought out by Christ, which is cause of great joy and gladness; or of the work of grace upon the soul, which when a man is satisfied of, gives him infinite pleasure, as knowing it will be performed until the day of Christ; and when a man is in such a joyful frame of spirit, he is in a very suitable one to sing the praises of God, James 5:13, **I will triumph in the works of thine hands**; those before mentioned; or shout aloud for joy, on account of them; and also triumph over all enemies, as being out of the reach of them, so as to be hurt and ruined by them. Let me ask you now whether you have been made glad through God’s work through Jesus Christ; whether you have great joy and gladness in beholding the work of grace upon your soul? Do you have infinite pleasure knowing that God will continue to work in your heart and supply you with grace to transform you, until the day of Christ?

Listen also to 2nd Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14 – “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” “To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life.” “And who is sufficient for these things?” I wonder if you see Christ as your sufficiency in living the Christian life? Do you see His triumph as the basis of your triumph, both in terms of becoming holy, and in terms of sharing the gospel with others so that they catch the fragrance of Christ in your speech and see Christ in your actions. This is what you have been called to; but do you see Christ as the Dread Champion of your faith?

Now 4th – The experience of your faith faltering.

We find a very strange thing happening to Jeremiah at this time in his ministry. We find him praising God in one verse, and in the next we find him cursing the day that he was born. Verse 13 – “Sing to the Lord!” “Praise the Lord!” “For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers.” And then in verse 14 – “Cursed be the day in which I was born!” “Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me!” And he continues in this same vein down to verse 18. This truly is a marvel; that a true believer, who was also a prophet, would act in this way, and say these things. Jeremiah has just declared his faith in God’s power and praises Him in verse 13. And then, after experiencing so much progress in conformity to Christ, Jeremiah’s faith faltered and he became very discouraged. Let us understand that if this happened to Jeremiah that it can happen to the best of God’s people. Job experienced this; Peter experienced this; and Paul experienced this. You also find it in David Brainerd, and even in Charles Spurgeon.

Now let us understand that it was the powerful experience of remaining corruption of the flesh, in Jeremiah’s heart, that this could happen to him. He had made great progress in his

becoming more conformed to the image of Christ. But now he questions why he had even come forth from the womb. I wonder if there may be some here today who have had thoughts like this occur to them? Let us remember that faith is not a constantly stable grace. It needs to be supported moment by moment by the power and presence of our precious Savior. And it needs to be exercised on a daily basis for the believer to be stable and confident in their trust, so that they will not be moved by doubts and fears and anxieties of various sorts. Turn with me over to John chapter 16, verses 12-32. Jesus says: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." "All things that the Father has are Mine." "Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." "Then some of His disciples said among themselves, 'What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father?'" "They said therefore, 'What is this that He says, 'A little while?'" "We do not know what He is saying." "Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them,

"Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me?'" "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." "A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world." "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." "And in that day you will ask Me nothing." "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you." "Until now you have asked nothing in My name." "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father." "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God." "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world." "Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." "His disciples said to Him, 'See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!'" "Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You." "By this we believe that You came forth from God." "Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe?'" "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone." "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace." "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Now, in closing this sermon I would like to point out some things that may be of great help to you in your own experience of Christ. We have been asking ourselves – How is it that a true believer can be one moment praising and thanking God, and singing to the Lord, that He is the One who delivers the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers; and the next moment this same person does not seem to have any awareness of the presence of the Lord with them; so much so, that they want to die? I think that the problem is that our faith is so easily affected by our experience of what we are called to do. Jeremiah had been called to preach to a people who were stiff-necked and hard-hearted. He knew that God was sovereign and had ordained all things in order to show forth His righteous hatred of sin and His great mercy to those who were poor in

spirit. He wished so much that things could be different than they were, but he knew in his heart that they could not change. This was the reason that he spoke in the way that he did.

In the case of the apostles, here in John 16, Jesus was telling them that there were many things that He wanted to say to them then, but they could not bear it at that time. There were things which concerned what kind of ministry that they were going to have, and how they would be persecuted, and yet, He tells them, the Holy Spirit would come and guide them into all the truth. He would not speak on His own, or about Himself. He would hear what the Father and the Son wanted revealed and He would tell them of those things which would come in regard to the advance of the kingdom of God. All the things which the Father had were Christ's. And therefore, the Spirit would take of the things of Christ and show them to the apostles. They had been troubled about Jesus' saying that in a little while they would not see Him, and then again a little while and they would see Him again. They did not understand this. Jesus explains this to them, in very vague and general terms of what would happen when He went to the cross. He was going to suffer and die. He was going away. They would weep and lament, but the world would rejoice. They would be sorrowful for a time, and then their sorrow would be turned to joy because of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, and to send the Holy Spirit to them. And yet they knew nothing of the reality of the cross, or the resurrection, and what that would mean for them.

In verse 28, He explains to them that He had come forth from the Father and had come into the world. Now He was to leave the world and go to the Father. The disciples are ecstatic. They knew that He was speaking plainly to them. They tell Him that they believe that He came forth from God. And Jesus answers in verse 31 – “Do you now believe?” Certainly they thought that they did, and that they understood. But they had not really understood the cost of all that Jesus was going to do and accomplish in the next few days. Jesus says: “Indeed, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone.” “And yet, I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” Then this crowning statement in verse 33 – “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.” “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Let me ask in closing whether you have understood why Jesus had to go to the cross and die? It was for your sins if you believe in Him. The disciples believed, but they did not understand what it would cost Jesus to bring them peace and good cheer as well as the forgiveness of sins and the grace they would need to change to become like Him. It would mean that many hopes of earthly peace would have to be disturbed. It would mean that when He was betrayed that they would all deny Him and flee, and Jesus would be left alone. But let us remember that Jesus was not alone; the Father was with Him to help Him to accomplish all things necessary for our salvation. Will you not remember that Jesus died and rose again in order that you who believe in Him would never be alone? O, it is true that there may be times when you may feel overwhelming sorrow, and feel as though you have been left alone. But even though you go through this tribulation, yet you are not alone.

And so, you should indeed be of good cheer, even when you cannot see why it should be so because of your earthly circumstances. You have Christ with you, even when your faith is faltering, even when your heart is breaking, even though you might feel deserted, and the Spirit seems to have withdrawn. Remember, Jesus overcame the world. He has overcome sin and death on your behalf. And He who has begun a good work in you will not leave you until it is finished. Remember, He will in time return to you with a sense of His presence and blessing. He will renew your strength and faith, and He will give you His peace, and that joy which no man can take away from you. May you remember and trust in Him in those moments, or hours, or days, in which you feel that He has left you alone. He has not left you. He is the process of perfecting your faith.

