

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

JEREMIAH IS PERSECUTED BUT RESCUED

First Reading – Jeremiah 38:1-13

¹Shephatiah son of Mattah, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah had told the people when he said, ²"This is what the LORD says. Whoever remains in this city will die by sword, famine, and plague, but whoever goes over to the Chaldeans will live. He will escape with his life, and he will live. ³This is what the LORD says. This city will surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it." ⁴Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be put to death because he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in the city. He is demoralizing all the people by saying these things to them. This man is not seeking the welfare of the people. He wants to hurt them." ⁵King Zedekiah answered, "Very well. He is in your hands. The king cannot do anything to stop you." ⁶So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They let Jeremiah down by ropes. There was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

⁷Ebed Melek the Cushite, an official in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, ⁸Ebed Melek left the palace and said to the king, ⁹"My lord the king, everything that these men have done to Jeremiah the prophet is evil. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he is likely to die because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city." ¹⁰Then the king gave orders to Ebed Melek the Cushite: "Take thirty men from here under your command and lift Jeremiah the prophet up out of the cistern before he dies." ¹¹So Ebed Melek took command of the men and entered a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothing from there, and he lowered them with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. ¹²Ebed Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." After Jeremiah did that, ¹³they lifted him up with the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. After this Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

+ + +

INTRO – One of Edgar Allen Poe's scariest themes was to be buried alive. Poe's 1844 "Premature Burial" recounted several of these stories of his time, grotesque, horrifying stories when people were discovered to be alive after burial. The narrator in Poe's short story ends up being so paranoid of being buried alive, that he remodels his family vault. He adds a handle on the inside of the vault door. He has the coffin padded, and the lid spring-loaded to open from the inside. He has a large bell hung on a string to alert anyone he might be alive.

The story culminates when the narrator awakens in pitch darkness in a confined area. He presumes he has been buried alive, and all his precautions were pointless. The narrator cries out and is immediately hushed; he quickly realizes that he is in the berth of a small boat, on a narrow, 18-in. bunk, not a grave. The event shocks him out of his obsession with death.

One of the thoughts we are faced with is: Can I be safe from the horrors of this world? To be buried alive is beyond question horrifying. Can God allow that or any other hardships to really happen to Christian?

Today we learn to be ready, since faith must face troubles and hardships. By definition, faith must bear crosses. In fact, faith takes hold of the power of Jesus in His sufferings and cross. Some have said the word F.A.I.T.H. itself means:

FORSAKING ALL | TRUST HIM

This was part of the story of Jeremiah, a prophet of faith.

Jeremiah was buried alive. He was in a deep dungeon. It used to be a well, but now a dry cistern. It was deep; he had to be lowered in by ropes. There was only darkness and mud at the bottom. They wanted to forget Jeremiah and that he had ever existed.

He had been in similar situations. In fact, no other prophet was so often in imminent danger of losing his life than Jeremiah. They had him placed in the stocks; arrested and sentenced to death; cornered and almost killed. The king had his book, the book of Jeremiah, read and scratched off and thrown in the fire. Jeremiah had to rewrite Jeremiah (longest book in the Bible).

Why did these awful things happen to Jeremiah? Short answer: He was preaching, teaching, and sharing God's Word in its truth and purity. He was in the dungeon because he was delivering the words of God. The most offensive thing you could say to these people in roughly 605 B.C. was, "Thus saith the Lord." And Jeremiah said it in our sermon text – twice. Jeremiah was ready to forsake all in order to trust Him, God. Jeremiah knew that trusting Him didn't always mean cakes and parties.

Jeremiah knew that trusting Him would mean forsaking all.

Jerusalem was nearing its end. The city was entrenched in battle with Babylon. God brought them sword, famine, and pestilence. He did this because time and again these Israelites of Jeremiah's time were guilty. They were guilty of thanklessness for God's many fruitful blessings; of miscarrying justice, calling evil good and good evil; and for their love of lies and false preachers. ***They wanted to trust God unless it meant forsaking all.***

The only way to escape that with their lives now was to surrender, "thus saith the Lord." This was how they might possibly live. Jeremiah's "thus saith the Lord" was out of love for his people and concern for their safety.

But that was too unbelievable and too unpatriotic for Jerusalem's leaders, even if "thus saith the Lord." They were indulging themselves in politics and warfare, and they were losing. This means that ***their faithlessness was so twisted that they didn't want to trust even the easy parts.*** They didn't want to forsake their pride, patriotism, and who they felt they were.

We may imagine that "thus saith the Lord" is what we want to hear. Instead, "thus saith the Lord" is often instead what we need to hear. There is a part of us, our inner sinner, who chafes under "thus saith the Lord." The Lord invites us to do the hard thing of forsaking all, and not just trust God in the easy times. It teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions. "Thus saith the Lord" may be what we need to hear ... when it is the last thing we want to hear. It may be the only thing that may save us from this world's troubles.

Instead, "thus saith the Lord" can become our cross to bear like it was Jeremiah's cross to bear. Like a ***heavy weight***, a ton of dynamite, an atomic bomb – Jeremiah lugged it around. Forsaking all. Trusting God. How heavy!

God lays a cross on all believers in order that they may taste and prove the power of God, taken hold of through faith. When faith begins, God does not forsake it; He lays the holy cross on our backs to strengthen us and to make faith powerful in us. The Gospel is a powerful Word, that it cannot do its work without trials. Trusting God in the hard times really tests and approves us. Only tasting how good it is causes us to forsake all other things.

But it is powerful, and it is heavy. And people mock us for lugging around this powerful weight of explosive good news. It looks like a hard thing. They feel it like it's an irritating thing. They even hurt Christians for this. It happens in places where laws do not safeguard freedom of religion. We sometimes hear offended Christians call for justice, for safety, and for our rights. But Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:11). One of those prophets: Jeremiah.

You have taken hold of the Gospel's power by faith. Isn't it heavy? Isn't it powerful? Isn't it explosive? It's hard enough that Jesus says we must deny ourselves what we think gives us happiness. We must deny our sinful selves when we would rather say the easy thing, not "thus saith the Lord." In denying ourselves the temptation to throw that weight away, we have faith. In denying ourselves what we wish to say instead of "thus saith the Lord," we have faith. In denying ourselves the hesitation to speak up, we have faith. In denying ourselves, Forsaking All, I Trust Him.

- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 – 'But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'
- Acts 5:41 – The disciples left the Jewish courtroom "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."
- Acts 14:22 – We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

We falsely assume God will give us the greatest joy through pleasure here and now, through success here and now. God will determine what can give us the greatest joy. He disciplines us with a moment of trial and hardship, it will give us the greatest joy. We learn through our own crosses to look ahead to heavenly joy, and so find joy in trials and hardships now.

But soon God rescues. He gave Jeremiah this cross, to wait in the mire and mud. Then God sent Jeremiah a eunuch, a Gentile, excluded from the congregation according to Deuteronomy, to speak boldly. Jeremiah was old by now. The ropes they lowered would accommodate the old man, because Ebedmelech, the king's eunuch servant, found rags and tatters to put under his arms and body as they raised him up. Jeremiah had earlier preached,

- Jeremiah 31:3 – The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

What cords of love! Instead of forgetting Jeremiah, buried alive, God drew Jeremiah with an unfailing lovingkindness.

And although "thus said the Lord" brought on Jeremiah these kinds of crosses, the greatest piece of wood God laid on Jeremiah was small for now. It was the shoot that would come up from the stump of Jesse, designated "the Lord our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6. That was the reason Jeremiah must suffer this cross. The Lord who said all these things would set Jeremiah free of crosses with His own cross. The God of eternity would become a descendant of Jesse and King David, of royal lineage to be our true King. Then He would grow into a man and grow the faith in hearts of those who had an

ear to hear. Then the cross would fall on His back, and the cross would be affixed to His body. He would lose His life so that we could have eternal life. It all seemed so distant for Jeremiah in the mud, just as it may seem distant to you and me. But as God made Jeremiah like a bronze wall, He will make you firm in the face of troubles and hardships that come with Forsaking All, I Trust Him.

To be sure, I must believe in His cross; but I must bear my own cross. My cross is to “forsake all.” This is the hard part. Forsaking all my heart’s wants, I trust Him. Forsaking all sinful flesh, I trust Him. Forsaking all vanishing pleasures here, I trust Him. Forsaking all my bad habits, I trust Him. Forsaking all hope in American politics, I trust Him. Forsaking all athletics and sports teams, I trust Him. Forsaking all dirty films, I trust Him. Forsaking all my heart wants to have in this world, I trust Him.

This is how I put His suffering into my own heart. This is how I lose my life in order to save it. This is how I face discomfort instead of setting my Christianity on “coast.”

Then I have the true treasure. Forsaking all means that whatever I have lost, I still trust Him who created whatever I forsake. This Bringer of Creation and this Bearer of the Cross, Jesus Christ, can give much more of the same thing or better. By faith, Forsaking All, I Trust Him through the cross, through death, to heaven.

Amen.