

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

JEREMIAH 19-20

¹⁴Then Jeremiah came back from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the courtyard of the House of the LORD and said to all the people: ¹⁵“This is what the LORD of Armies, the God of Israel, says. I will certainly bring on this city and on all its towns every disaster that I have proclaimed against it, because they have become stiff-necked, refusing to hear my words.”

^{20:1}When Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who served as the chief officer in the House of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying about these things, ²Pashhur ordered them to beat Jeremiah the prophet, and he put him in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate in the House of the LORD.

³The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, “The LORD does not call you Pashhur, but Magor Missabib, ⁴for this is what the LORD says: I will certainly make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They will fall by the sword of their enemies before your very eyes. I will hand Judah over to the king of Babylon. He will carry the people captive to Babylon, and he will strike them with the sword. ⁵Also, the riches of this city, all its property, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah—I will give it all away into the hands of their enemies. They will plunder them, seize them, and carry them off to Babylon. ⁶As for you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house, you will go into captivity. You will go to Babylon! You will die there, and you will be buried there, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied falsely.”



Some voices bemoan our society’s ‘cancel culture.’ It is a fancy term for severe censorship. Somewhat of a boycott of a person, cancel culture combines public backlash and mob mentality with public shaming. A person shares an ugly or unpopular opinion, maybe decades ago. This jeopardizes the livelihood and reputation of someone based on something they said or did in the past. Just a simple social media post from years ago can prevent you from getting a job. It can happen to famous people, like comedians or actors. It can happen to the average citizen. Sometimes it turns a sub-group against someone. Sometimes it bullies people into apologizing, just to say their apology isn’t sincere. Even former president, Barack Obama, has cautioned against cancel culture.

Would you believe that cancel culture is not a new problem? It was quite different in Jerusalem around 600 B.C. – no social media, no TV broadcasts, actual physical shaming in the public square – but the fact remains that the majority often fails. The majority certainly failed throughout the ministry of Jeremiah. The mob mentality despised the preaching of God’s Word.

Jeremiah would just have to take heart and have courage. But there’s no way to do that when you’re being cancelled UNLESS you have the assistance and strength of Almighty God. There’s no way to take heart and have courage unless true God knows the plans He has for a prophet like Jeremiah, plans to give hope and a future, to prosper the prophet and not to harm him. So to get through this would take ...

GOD’S COURAGE FOR ‘CANCELLED’ PROPHETS

1. He forewarns us that courage must be shown

Jeremiah the prophet had just come from the potter’s house in the south part of the city of Jerusalem. He had delivered a sermon to the people about this truth: God can do what He wants with His people. He can discard them after an accident, He can finish the marred vessel, or make an entirely new vessel out of the clay. A new vessel can be like the former one or one altogether different, exactly as seems good and right to Him.

The people knew their sin and guilt, that they liked to walk “according to their plans,” and they liked to act “according to the hardness of” their own hearts (18:12). They were stiff-necked and stubborn. But no sooner did Jeremiah come back to the heart of Jerusalem, and begin to preach that sermon, that the people did NOT listen to his words ... that they refused to listen to his words!

So Passhur, the “*chief officer*” in the house of the Lord, second-in-command to the high priest, refused to listen to Jeremiah’s words. Passhur, who was supposed to be the Lord’s priest, labeled Jeremiah a disturber of the peace. Jeremiah was cancelled. Likely the beatings Jeremiah received were 39 lashes, in accordance with the law in Deuteronomy. Then Passhur placed Jeremiah “*in the stocks at the upper Benjamin Gate in the house of the Lord.*” Also known as the Sheep Gate, this gate was heavily used.

The stocks were a painful and shameful penalty. Growing up and visiting colonial America, I remember seeing stocks at old forts and Revolutionary War towns. Two wooden boards clamped down on your feet or hands in the public square. Stocks in Jeremiah's time weren't any easier, sometimes made of iron, always keeping the prisoner in a crooked, uncomfortable position. Jeremiah was beaten and placed in the stocks, and for what? For preaching the sermon God told him to preach; for telling it like it is in Jerusalem; for preaching God's Word in its truth and purity.

As it turns out, all of us who share God's Word in its truth and purity are likely to be labelled as extremist, called out, and cancelled. Our feet may not be locked in the stocks, but we may be publicly shamed and ridiculed.

- We may feel like we're no longer allowed to speak truth to that sister who walked away from the faith shortly after confirmation.
- We may feel like we're cancelled by that depressed cousin who refuses all semblance of encouragement.
- We may even lose our jobs if our unpopular opinions do not conform to the ways of the unbelieving world.

Would it be encouraging to know that Jeremiah suffered, too? Would it help to know that Jeremiah faced trials and hardships, and that this is nothing new? Would we risk losing friendships, losing relationships, losing our jobs, and being cancelled just to put what is in this book (Bible) into the eyes and ears of lost sinners?

2. He forgives us with courage of His own

The punishment for Pashhur, this "chief officer," would be severe. The priest's life would be swept into the horrors of Babylonian exile. His friends would fall to the sword all around him. As they fell, his friends would accuse him with the nickname, Magor-Missabib, "terrors roundabout"! Pashhur would not be so fortunate as to die in the rubble of Jerusalem. He would be taken as a slave to Babylon. He would live in shame and never see his homeland again. And Pashhur would know that it was all because he refused to listen to Jeremiah's words.

But why were Jeremiah's words so bleak anyway? What you might not know outside of context is how long God had warned these people. They were 350 years removed from King David and Solomon. The people had forgotten God,

sacrificed to vanities, stumbled on their ways, the typical ungraded paths of false gods (18:15-16). The people of Jerusalem were notorious syncretists; i.e., when worshipers of the true God try to put Him together with other false gods and works-based religions. They added the starry host to their worship and burned incense to them. They poured out drink offerings to other gods (19:13). They had every opportunity to hedge themselves off and to be set apart like a people belonging to the Lord, but every opportunity was spoiled by sin.

And here they were, patting each other on the back for scorning and deriding the Lord's elect, Jeremiah the prophet.

There would be no cultural redeeming for Jeremiah. He would just have to take heart and have courage. He would have to know his enemies could kill the body, but not the soul. Jeremiah would have to hope in the redemption of His Savior-God, who numbered every hair on his head. He would have to root himself in the Righteous Branch, the Lord our Righteousness, and know that the Messiah would one day come and rescue the few who believed him and loved His Word.

Neither would there be any cultural redeeming for the Redeemer of all sinners, Jesus Christ. Six hundred years later, the Lord Jesus Christ our Righteousness would just have to align Himself with His Father's will and be the plans God has for us. He would just have to take the beatings and the insults, the spittings and the onslaught of the cross, as our Substitute for sin. He has become our hope and our future. He has become our resurrection and life. He has become our justification and atonement, for He was cancelled.

Yet when Jesus was cancelled, so was our sin: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross* (Col. 2:13-15). Jesus Christ has taken away even wicked Israel's sins and cancelled the crimes of Passhur ... not to mention you and me. The Word in the flesh was despised, so that we might speak His Word of cancellation to all flesh. In this courageous Savior, may we take heart and have courage. Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.