

Our Help comes from the LORD

(Jeremiah 15:15-21)

The LORD was angry at the wickedness of Judah. So the Lord told His prophet Jeremiah, “Send them away.” Send them away to destruction. The monstrous impenitence of Judah and the unbending justice of God caught Jeremiah between them. He staggered under the burden. Struggle as he may, he could not extricate himself from the cold despair, which slowly numbed his faith.

The people of Judah refused to listen and instead saw Jeremiah as the enemy. As Ahab once pointed an accusing finger at Elijah, saying, “You are the one who troubles Israel,” so Jeremiah’s contemporaries lashed out at him. If it wasn’t for him and his incessant preaching of judgment, the land would be at peace. The Lord told him at the very beginning of his ministry that all would oppose him. Now the reality of that prophecy was bearing down on Jeremiah with all its force. Yet the Lord consoled His prophet with the assurance that everything would turn out according to His good purpose.

In his effort to fight off the damp darkness creeping into his soul, Jeremiah turned to the Word, to his certain knowledge of the Lord’s character. He confessed that the Lord knew the anguish of his heart and felt with him and for him. The Lord would not let him be taken away. The prophet had been faithful to his calling. How many insults had stung him! How often he had been called the fool for his message! How many times the people of Judah had thrown the question in his face, “Where is the fulfillment of the Lord’s Word?”

According to the Lord’s own command to him, Jeremiah had stood apart from the normal social activities. By doing so he had given testimony to the terror of the coming judgment. He had always found his strength in the Lord’s Word.

God’s Word was his support, the food of his life. What pleasure, what force of life came to him as he devoured it! How it lifted his soul and refreshed his spirit! How gladly he bore the name of the Lord! He looked to that Word now to ward off the doubt so swiftly coming upon him. It had not failed him in the past.

This time, however, Jeremiah let the comfort of the Word slip from him. He fell back on his own strength, and soon the pain overwhelmed him. The blackness of despair, drawing everything into itself, engulfed the prophet’s faith, hope, and very spirit. He could not hold back his doubts any longer. They rushed upon him. They made the Lord’s Word seem only a distant whisper. They called God’s promise and person into question. Has God become an intermittent stream like water that is unreliable? In the heat of trouble does God give out on us? Jeremiah’s aching bones and weary soul cried out; they shouted in the face of God, “Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?” His inner pain blotted out hope, all the love he had known from the Lord, and every promise by which he had lived.

The Lord loved Jeremiah, so He shocked him to his senses. In the midst of such unbelief and despair, such smallness and narrowness of vision, God slapped the prophet in the face with the word “repent.” Turn to Me, listen to My voice, serve Me, grab hold of My promise, and forget about yourself. The Lord repeated the promise He had made at the very beginning of Jeremiah’s work. At that point the Lord had promised to make Jeremiah a bronze wall against all the people (1:18). Now God urged him to become again the worthy spokesman he had been.

Jeremiah had lost his sense. He had become like those to whom he was preaching; he had begun to turn to them; he had begun to relinquish the truth of God. The Lord called him back. The Lord told him, “Do not be afraid; trust what I have said, and what you do will not be in vain.” We do not hear the prophet’s response. We can see by his action, however, that he took to heart what the Lord had told him here and that he continued on with a renewed faithfulness to his calling.

Even great men of faith fall prey to doubt and despair. They are examples for us. If they fear, if they doubt, if they need encouragement, if they need admonition, if they need help, if they need the preaching of the law and the repeated assurance of the promises of God, how much more do we! We may all expect to drink some of the same bitter cup as did the prophet here. We all will need to be shocked out of our stupor by God’s call to repentance. But with the Lord’s help we will find our way back to Him, as did Jeremiah. From these experiences, both Jeremiah’s and ours, we are made more ready to be shining lights to others who also drift into the fog of doubt and despair. We have been there and have returned. We may be able to help them return too.