

Jeremiah 12:1-6

“You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts. Yet you know me, O Lord; you see me and test my thoughts about you. Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter! How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. Moreover, the people are saying, “He will not see what happens to us.” “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan? Your brothers, your own family, even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you.”

Most schools and colleges have begun winding down and heading toward exams and a close to this current school year. New graduates will enter the next phase of their lives. What will happen then? How well will they fair in this sin sick world? Parents of a college freshman received this letter from their daughter near the end of her first semester a few years ago.

Dear Mom and Dad. Sorry I failed to write all semester, but college life has kept me really busy. About two months ago I was slightly injured in a car accident near the shopping mall. The injuries were not too serious and the paramedic was really nice. We went out a few times and he invited me to move in with him, which sure beats dorm life a lot. He's extremely smart even though he never finished high school. I really like his long hair and tattoos, and you ought to see his new body piercings. The weekends are a real blast, and party a lot, but in moderation. I especially hope you like him since I may be expecting our first child soon. Love, Your daughter.

P.S. There was no accident, no paramedic, no love affair, no drugs, and no baby. However, I am anticipating getting two D's and one F this semester. When my grades arrive, I wanted you to have things in proper perspective.

Life is a matter of maintaining proper perspective. There are things in our lives which cause us to lose our perspective in life. How do we regain perspective when we have lost it? We can quarrel with God, we can fight with God, we can make up with God, but whatever we do we need to realize, we are never without God. God can handle our arguments. God can live with us through our despair. God may even deal with our arrogance, but when we reach the point where we believe we are it and we are number one and everything revolves around us; when we act as if we are bigger than our creator That's when God draws the line.

Over our many years we make choices. With those choices come actions. We either curse God for our circumstances, or we invite God into those circumstances of our lives. Two people break a hip and one feels hurt and full of heartache and the other feels helped and full of hope. Two couples have a handicapped child. One father cannot stand it and files for divorce. The other father thanks God for helping him understand the real value of family. We make choices. Two people lose their job. One sees disaster the other sees opportunity. We decide for ourselves how we react to the world around us.

Often times people say “they made me do this or they made me do that,” nobody made you do anything, you made a conscience choice to do whatever it is you do. You choose what you do and how you will do it, and how you will react to what others chose to do.

In our passage this morning Jeremiah is upset with God. Have you ever been upset with God? Jeremiah is upset at the prosperity of the wicked. Many people become upset at situations where it seems God has allowed the wicked to prosper ahead of Christians. Do we as Christians do as we are called to do, do we tell the world of Christ? Do we say and do what we should be saying and doing? Do we do as Jesus led us to and yet people don't listen? Do we do all we can and it seems nothing changes? The question which we need to ask ourselves at this point is, “Who do we think we are questioning God?”

Jeremiah was responding to the Lord's call to condemn Judah and to predict her downfall. He became so discouraged that he cried out to the Lord, “*Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?*”

That's when God said to Jeremiah, in essence, "*The competition has just begun. If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you run with the horses?*" What makes you think you can play with the big boys Jeremiah? If putting up with the wicked is wearing you out, what makes you think you can hang with the big boys? Now, how can we learn to run with the horses?

When the Union Railroad was being constructed, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon out West. Wanting to test the bridge, the builder loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the middle of the bridge, where it stayed an entire day. One worker asked, "Are you trying to break this bridge?" "No," the builder replied, "I'm trying to prove that the bridge won't break." God puts us to the test every day. Not to break us, but to see what we can withstand. God never puts more on us than we can handle. It may seem like a lot at the time but it will never be more than we can stand. What God brings you to He will bring you through.

God called out Jeremiah over his impatience, there were still greater trials of faith in store for him and he's complaining about the small stuff. What Jeremiah had to suffer from his countrymen at Anathoth was nothing compared with the assaults that awaited him.

If the smallest evils to which you are exposed cause you to make so many complaints, how will you feel when, in the course of doing ministry, you will be exposed to much greater evil, from enemies much more powerful? If you have suffered under small difficulties, what will you do when the great ones come? The trials we experience will build our spiritual stamina. Evil prospering is after all an ordinary trial, a mere "*running with the footmen*;" we will have to exert far greater powers of endurance to run with the horses.

When I go to the gym each morning and lift I am asked from time to time how I lift so much weight. It was not done overnight. I have worked at it since I was thirteen years old. Lifting one day and waking up sore and aching the next. Every day, more lifting and still more hurting; if I wanted to be able to lift with the big boys I was going to have to do what it took the reach that level.

It would not just happen, I would have to start small and work my way upward. I have to continue working just to keep up, if I decide to quit and or stop I will quickly lose what I worked so hard to achieve.

Matthew 25:21 says “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much.*” If we are to be given much we first must be faithful over the little. We need to manage what little we have faithfully, run with men so to speak, before we will be given much, or before we can run with the horses.

I have heard people say “I wish I had the faith he or she has.” They believe this person they look up to has more faith than they do, but the truth is we are all given the same amount. Romans 12:3 “*For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him.*” Each is given the same; the question is what I am going to do with what I have. Am I going to utilize the gift God has given me, or am I going to grumble and complain and ask for something else. If we can’t do with what God has given us today why would He give something more tomorrow?

It says in Isaiah 40: 31 “*But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*”

Perhaps you’ve run into some difficulties recently: difficulties with your boss, your job, an illness, or conflicts in your life or maybe with your family or maybe even with the church. You’ve pleaded with God for relief, but you don’t hear what you want to hear, or you’re not seeing what you want to see. God may be saying to you, “Toughen up. Dig in. It may get worse.” When He asks you to “*run with horses,*” He will be with you to strengthen and sustain you. That’s what God does. Remember Philippians 3:14 “*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*” Do you press on towards the goal or have you given up and quit or worse press on towards your own personal selfish goals? Think you can run with the horses? God will know when that time comes, now it’s up to you to handle what’s right in front of you ... don’t ask for more or different when you can’t handle what you have. Remember, “*those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.*”

Remember this; a clay pot sitting in the sun will always be a clay pot. It has to go through the white heat of the furnace to become porcelain.ⁱ

ⁱ Mildred Witte Struven, Bits and Pieces, September 19, 1991, p.6