

“Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?”

If you want warm fuzzy feelings, a Christianity of pastels and upbeat praise songs, and cute precious moments figurines, you may want to skip the book of Jeremiah and its companion, Lamentations.

But we live in a society where 8% of the population had a major depressive episode in 2021 alone, that number skyrockets to 20% for adolescents. In 2021, 12.3 million Americans seriously contemplated suicide and 48,183 people died from it.

We live in a society which is rapidly abandoning a Biblical worldview and belief system. In 1970, 90% of Americans identified as Christian. Today, it's less than 63%. In 1971, 1.34% of the U.S. population was LCMS, our most recent estimate is 0.54%.

It is tough to be a pastor or a lay leader in a congregation in today's society. A Barna poll tells that 40% of pastors across all denominations have average or worse emotional health, and 42% of pastors gave real consideration to quitting the ministry. Anecdotally, I personally know several pastors in our church body who have received care from mental health professionals for anxiety and depression.

On the other hand, if you want a book of the Bible that takes these realities seriously and grapples with them with unvarnished truth, then Jeremiah and Lamentations are books that speak to you and shine a ray of hope into the darkness.

Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because he was called to minister to the people of Jerusalem right before Jerusalem was invaded and destroyed by superpower Babylon. The Lord made it clear for the reasons of their destruction: they consistently and habitually chose to turn away from Him and worship gods of their own making. They oppressed the poor. They relied on their own might rather than the Lord's.

Jeremiah was imprisoned. He was thrown into a cistern. He was put into a stockade; people rejected him and did not want to hear his bad news. They called him a liar. It is this background that helps us understand our text today from Jeremiah 15.

Jeremiah pleads to God at the beginning of our text saying, **“O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach.”**

Jeremiah continues, ‘It all started out well. Your Word was a joy and delight. I am yours. I am called by your name. I am your representative. I did the right things. Yet why am I alone? Why is it that it hurts so much? Why is it so hard? Lord, have you tricked me?’

Yet the Lord replies to Jeremiah, ‘Remain faithful. Keep on telling the truth. You are my spokesperson. Some in Jerusalem will listen, but don’t follow the faithless masses just so you can draw a crowd. Remain true to my word, and you will become an impenetrable fortress because’ “...**I am with you to save you and deliver you.**”

Jeremiah remained faithful throughout all his ministry. The Lord went with him. However, Jeremiah was taken to Egypt against his will by Jews fleeing the destruction of Babylon. Tradition holds that he was stoned to death there for continuing to speak inconvenient truths. Despite this, 3. The Lord delivered Jeremiah through suffering.

How can this be? You might ask. We need look no farther than the man who tells us in today’s Gospel lesson “**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.**” Jeremiah may have been the weeping prophet who suffered much for the Lord Yahweh, but Jeremiah simply foreshadows the ministry of Jesus Christ.

It would have been easy for Jesus to go along to get along. He could have said the right things to appease the Sadducees and Pharisees. He had the power to lead a worldly revolt to free the Jews from the Romans, as many of them wished. He could have turned to them and their ways and they would have flocked around Him.

These words from Jeremiah were spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, but they can just as easily be put into the mouth of the Lord Jesus throughout the trials He faced in His ministry. Who has read, marked, and inwardly digested the Word of God more than Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate? Who is more aptly called by the name of God than Jesus Christ who is Himself the Lord Yahweh? Who has faced pain unceasing, incurable wounds as Jesus not only bore the torture of crucifixion, but took on the sins of the world, enduring hell itself.

Jesus was the mouth of the Father, calling God’s people to repent of their sins, and to follow in the way of everlasting life. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to the prophet Jeremiah of restoration and redemption for God’s people. Jesus remained faithful and stuck with this mission of redemption without giving into the pressures from the people of His day.

The Bible teaches us: “**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**” Jesus knows what Jeremiah went through because He endured it also. Jesus knows what you’re going through.

Our text in Jeremiah concludes, “**I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.**”” Jesus faced crucifixion and death, yet that was not the deliverance. The deliverance came on

the third day when the Father raised Him from the dead showing that the worst that sinful humanity can do is kill you, but in Christ, even though you die, you still live. It is through this hope of the resurrection that we can say that Jeremiah also was ultimately delivered. 2. The Lord delivered Jesus through suffering.

But what about me? You might ask. What about depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues? What about declining church participation and increasing hostility to the church? What about clergy health? What does this text have to say about that? These words of Jeremiah that could just as easily have been in Jesus' mouth are also ours.

Dear Christian friend, you are baptized, and that means you are called by the name of God. You are a Christian, which means you are marked with the very name of Yahweh who created the universe, redeemed it through His Son, and works to make you whole through the Holy Spirit.

Dwell on God's Words, eat them up, they are a joy and delight of your heart, even when all the world tells you they are superstition or lies. Dwell on His promises of redemption, salvation, and deliverance that God gives you in His Word.

Don't budge. Stay firm on God's Word. When asked to take back what he wrote, Luther famously said, "My conscience is captive to the word of God! To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I therefore cannot, and will not recant! Here I stand. I can do no other." Abiding in this word, the Lord makes you "**a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you.**"

Throw yourself upon the mercy of God. You are going to fail. You are going to be a bad witness to our Savior. There is forgiveness! Luther wrote a letter to his friend in the ministry George Spalatin who fell into a depression over making a serious pastoral blunder. Luther wrote, "It is quite enough that you have sinned. Now let go of it. Don't let your despondency lead to an even greater offence. The Lord says 'I do not wish the death of the sinner, but rather that he repent and live.' Do you really think that in your case alone the Lord's hand is shortened? Or has the Lord in your case alone ceased to be merciful?" (August 21 1544 letter Pg. 274, Of Good Comfort, Martin Luther's Letters to the Depressed and their Significance for Pastoral Care Today by Stephen Pietsch, [2016, ATF Theology Adelaide: Australia]).

In the midst of suffering, the Lord promises us restoration because he is with us to save us and deliver us. That may look like combining pastoral care with psychiatric care in the case of a mental illness. Stephen Pietsch in his book which I just quoted from illustrates the ways that Luther sought to console others going through depression.

When it comes to shrinking churches, restoration may look like increased membership and participation in our church both locally and worldwide. The church in the global south is growing rapidly even as churches in the north shrink.

But beyond all those details, we know that the Lord has won the victory already in Jesus Christ. Our restoration is here, even as we are promised to see that with our very eyes when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead and to bring about everlasting life with Him forever. There will be a day when your pain will cease, and your wounds cured. 1. The Lord delivers me through suffering.

THE LORD DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE THROUGH SUFFERING.