

JEREMIAH: SHINING AS SPIRITUAL TWILIGHT FALLS
"Part VII: Rising Above Godless Opposition To Gain God's Blessing"
(Jeremiah 37-39)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

[I use the illustrations of a personal nature in both the introduction and conclusion sections of today's message with the *sole* motivation to help others in their walk of faith. Though **conscientiously** trying to use **another, NON-personal illustration, I was repeatedly driven by the Lord by numerous events back to these illustrations!** Thus, *please* view these words as coming from a mere "*beggar sharing with others where he found some bread.*"]

(1) Over the years, my **office** has been the scene of some of the most difficult experiences I have faced, for **there** I have fielded the most personal of criticisms of my pastoral ministry at Nepaug.

(2) Well, a few years ago, as had happened a number of times before, a party typically came into my office and shared the idea that I leave Nepaug. My ministry **style** and **personality** was allegedly better suited to ministry in a *seminary* somewhere else!

I had heard this often before, and each time the Lord had followed it up by encouraging me to continue pastoring. After all, Scripture taught that all spiritual gifts, including mine, were designed to be used to edify the Church long before seminaries existed. Still, after hearing this issue brought up **again**, I started to wonder if indeed I had somehow missed my calling from the **Lord** by *staying* at Nepaug.

(3) Also, there have been times when the Wednesday and Sunday Evening services have been attended so sparsely that I have wondered if I should be doing something different, or doing it somewhere *else!*

Well, how does ANY Christian who faces difficulty or opposition in the workplace, home, or other environment where he is convinced GOD has called him to function, operate when consistently, effectively OPPOSED?

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section as follows . . .)

Need: "*I or a friend is trying to do God's will in a setting where others not only OPPOSE God's will, but OVERTLY try to oppose the WELFARE or SUCCESS of the one trying to OBEY God! HOW can he FUNCTION and enjoy FULFILLMENT in such a setting?!*"

- I. **God called Jeremiah to urge his countrymen to repent, Jer. 1:5, 16.**
- II. **However, the Lord noted the task would be difficult, for the people had no mind to accept Jeremiah's words, Jeremiah 1:7-8, 17, 19a.**
- III. **Yet, WERE Jeremiah to TRUST God and DO the task, God would protect his life from even hostile listeners, Jeremiah 1:17b-19.**
- IV. **During the final Babylonian siege, Jeremiah obeyed God's calling amidst stiff opposition from his countrymen. Accordingly, GOD KEPT His PROMISE to provide for Jeremiah's welfare, chs. 37-39:**
 - A. **Round One** - During the initial days of the final Babylonian siege, Jeremiah ministered unharmed though his prediction that Babylon would destroy Jerusalem went unheeded, Jeremiah 37:1-10.
 - B. **Round Two** - Jeremiah came to be unjustly accused and mistreated, but God made it possible for him to survive, Jeremiah 37:11-21:
 1. The Babylonians temporarily withdrew their siege to fight the invading Egyptians, so Jeremiah tried to tend to personal business by leaving Jerusalem for his home in Benjamin, Jeremiah 37:11-12.
 2. However, he was arrested at the city gate and wrongly charged with trying to leave and side with the Babylonians, Jer. 37:13-14b.
 3. Jeremiah was then taken to Jerusalem's princes, beaten and placed for many days in a damp dungeon, Jer. 37:14c-16. This dungeon was life-threatening to Jeremiah by his own testimony, Jer. 37:20b.
 4. Yet, God used the **fickle** king, Zedekiah to *provide* for Jeremiah's removal to a safer, better prison, Jeremiah 37:17-21:
 - a. Though Zedekiah had not heeded Jeremiah's prophecies (Jer. 37:1-2), he still became concerned enough about his future welfare to ask Jeremiah if God had a message for him, 37:17a.
 - b. Jeremiah again repeated his old, unpopular message to Zedekiah that Babylon would conquer Jerusalem, Jeremiah 37:17b.
 - c. He then claimed his innocence and asserted his credibility in reminding the king that his prophecy about Babylon's siege had come true versus what the false prophets had predicted, 37:18f.
 - d. Further, Jeremiah asked to be moved to safer quarters, 37:20.
 - e. Though Jeremiah had given the same old *negative* message, and reminded Zedekiah of his **error** in not defending Jeremiah, the **criticized** king *still gave* Jeremiah what he requested, Jer. 37:21.
 - f. **The Lord thus moved this *ungodly* king to help Jeremiah, keeping His Jer. 1:17b-19 promise to protect the prophet!**

- C. Round Three - Jeremiah was imprisoned **again** in a *worse* state along with the **permission** of fickle Zedekiah, but God used a **foreigner to preserve** His promise regarding Jeremiah's welfare, Jeremiah 38:1-28:
1. Some very godless, antagonistic princes despised Jeremiah's call for the people to surrender to Babylon for God's blessing, Jer. 38:1-4. They urged the vacillating Zedekiah to stop Jeremiah's preaching, so the king let them do what they wanted to the prophet, Jer. 38:5.
 2. Jeremiah ended up bogged down in the sediment of a large empty rain storage cistern, a condition that would bring him starvation and death, Jer. 38:6 in light of Bible Knowledge Com., O.T., p. 1183.
 3. However, the **Lord** used an *African* eunuch named Ebed-melech to appeal to Zedekiah for Jeremiah's release, Jeremiah 38:7-9.
 4. Zedekiah heeded this appeal, arranging for Jeremiah to be moved to the prison of the royal guards until Jerusalem fell, Jer. 38:10-13, 28.
 5. For his faith in God as exhibited in his help of God's prophet, God rewarded Ebed-melech with preserving his physical life during the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah 39:15-18!
- D. Round Four - When Jerusalem finally fell, God supplied each of Jeremiah's needs in **contrast** to the fate of his long-time persecutors:
1. Jerusalem fell with much horror, Jer. 39:1-14: King Zedekiah was **captured** and **abused** (39:4-7), Jerusalem was **set ablaze** and **demolished** (39:8) with its people being taken into *exile*, 39:9-10.
 2. Yet, the Babylonians entered the prison of the guards to **release** and **reward** Jeremiah, appointing him **PROTECTION** from his enemies under their puppet ruler, Gedaliah, Jer. 39:11-14; 40:1-6.

Application: *To enjoy God's SUFFICIENT provision amidst opposing, ominous parties in ANY setting, (1) become a child of God by faith in Christ (Jn. 3:16) to enjoy God's "much-more care" (Rom. 8:32). (2) Then, simply TRUST God's enabling to be SUFFICIENT to EQUIP us to achieve whatever God CALLS us to do. (3) Then LAUNCH OUT to PERFORM His will and WATCH Him faithfully, sufficiently provide to keep His servant on track!*

Lesson: *When God ASSIGNS a believer a task to do, REGARDLESS what OPPONENTS try to COUNTER that believer's welfare in the process, God EQUIPS him with all he needs to ACHIEVE it!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

(1) This year, where (as I said before) most of the words that I leave Nepaug have been fielded -- my *office* was remodeled. Al Zodda put down a carpet obtained at a special bargain. **What sticks out about the project is how all my furnishings BLEND as though it was DESIGNED that way! In reality, the office was furnished from a VARIETY of NON-INTERACTING parties OTHER than myself over a FIVE YEAR period, and one furnishing, my creamy-beige horizontal file, I bought 33 YEARS ago!** I conclude the **Lord** blended the office to make me feel at *HOME* in the very **room** where I've faced so many **challenges** to my even *STAYING*! He has **again** encouraged me to remain versus the suggestions by others!

(2) Regarding my pastoral style and personality, this last month, I was actually **thanked** by a party in the Church whose mainly Catholic and **religiously oppressed** associate(s) were **positively** influenced by my ministry of the Word last month! I found myself responding to the one who thanked me by repeating what the Lord revealed after my 1990 car accident: He then signaled that my ministry **style** is what He *wants* at Nepaug to disciple **especially (such oppressed) Catholics!**

(3) Regarding what I believe is God's will in having the Church be encouraged to attend more Prayer Meeting and Sunday Evening services, I note the following: Around five years ago, I **first** taught from Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 on **investing** during a **Wednesday Evening** service. I applied that insight **myself** in starting to invest for retirement. As a **result, GOD** saw to it that our **whole** IRA portfolio **multiplied 3 1/5 TIMES in 1999** (the funds were in **very volatile** internet-related stocks)! By **continuing** to heed Ecclesiastes, even if we add **no more** to the **less-than-\$10,000** we've invested over these last 5 years, the calculator "crunches out" the idea that we will have **over \$1,000,000** in 19 years! The Lord thus indicates He **supports** my urgings that the body attend these less-noted services, for doing so **benefits** the **body!**

When we DO what GOD sends us to perform, no matter what opposition or oppression we face in the process, GOD Himself provides for our needs so that we can ACHIEVE what He calls us to achieve! This arrangement really, really WORKS!