

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 10: The Broken Flask and Jeremiah's Anguish -- Jeremiah 19:1-20:18

God tells Jeremiah to buy a potter's earthenware flask, gather the elders and priests, and walk out to the Valley of Hinnom, that cursed ravine where Judah had burned their own children to idols. There, in front of those leaders, God says, "Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended.'" It is a different sign from the potter's wheel of the chapter before. There the spoiled clay could be reworked. Here the fired, hardened flask, once smashed, can never be made whole again. Some hardness, persisted in too long, passes the point of reshaping.

When Jeremiah comes back into the temple court and repeats the message, a powerful man named Pashhur, the chief officer of the house of the LORD, has had enough. He strikes the prophet, the priest beating the prophet, and locks him in the stocks at the upper gate, a public humiliation, body bent and exposed for all to mock. This is the cost of faithfulness laid bare. Jeremiah told the truth God gave him, and for it he is beaten and shamed by the very religious establishment that should have heard him. Faithfulness to God is no guarantee of comfort; sometimes it guarantees the opposite.

Released the next day, Jeremiah pours out one of the most raw and honest passages in all of Scripture. On one hand he says, "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." He has tried to quit, and he cannot, because God's word in him is a fire that will not be smothered. And yet in the same breath he can declare, "But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble." Faith and pain are not strangers in this man; they live in the same heart at the same time.

And then the floor drops out. The chapter ends not with triumph but with the prophet cursing the day he was born: "Cursed be the day on which I was born!... Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?" It is shocking that the Holy Spirit preserved these words. God did not edit out His servant's anguish. He let it stand, in the Book, forever, so that every weary, hurting believer would know that honest lament has a place before God. The God who breaks the unmendable flask is also the God who holds the broken-hearted prophet, and lets him grieve out loud.

Group Discussion: Jeremiah said God's word was "a burning fire shut up in my bones," so that he could not stay silent even when speaking cost him everything (20:9). What does this reveal about the power and compulsion of God's word in a faithful servant, and where do you sense any such fire, however small, in your own walk with God?

Personal Reflection: Jeremiah held faith and pain together in the same heart, declaring “the LORD is with me as a dread warrior” (20:11) and yet cursing the day of his birth (20:14). When you are hurting, are you more likely to perform a false cheerfulness or to grow silent and distant from God, and what would honest lament before Him look like for you?

Read Jeremiah 19:1–20:18

Study Questions

1. Read 19:1–13. Jeremiah breaks the potter’s flask and declares, “So will I break this people and this city... so that it can never be mended.” How does the smashed flask differ from the reworked clay of chapter 18, and what does it teach about the point at which persistent, unrepented sin brings irreparable judgment?
2. The sign was given in the Valley of Hinnom, where Judah had sacrificed their children to idols (19:4–5). What ‘unthinkable’ things has sin made acceptable in our own culture, and how can you keep your conscience tender rather than letting evil become normal to you?
3. Read 19:14–20:6. Pashhur, a priest and temple officer, beats Jeremiah and puts him in the stocks for faithfully delivering God’s word. What does this reveal about the cost of faithfulness, and why does opposition so often come from within the religious establishment itself?
4. Jeremiah suffered publicly for telling the truth God gave him (20:2). Where has standing for God’s truth cost you something, even rejection or ridicule, and how do you keep from either growing bitter or backing down?

5. Read 20:7–9. Jeremiah says God’s word is “a burning fire shut up in my bones,” so that though he wants to quit, “I cannot.” What does this teach about the nature and power of God’s word in those who carry it, and how is it both a burden and a gift?
6. Have you ever tried to stay silent about God or your convictions, only to find you could not? Where is God’s truth pressing on your heart now in a way you have been resisting, and what would faithfulness look like?
7. Read 20:11–13. In the middle of his pain Jeremiah declares, “But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior,” and even calls others to “sing to the LORD.” How can genuine faith and real anguish coexist in the same heart, and what does this teach us about trusting God’s presence in the fight?
8. Jeremiah praised God and grieved bitterly almost in the same breath (20:13–14). When you are in pain, how do you keep turning toward God in honest worship rather than away from Him, and who helps you do that?
9. Read 20:14–18. Jeremiah curses the day of his birth and asks why he was ever born to see “toil and sorrow.” Why would God preserve such raw, despairing words in Scripture, and what does this teach about honest lament, the place of grief before God, and the hope that holds even when feelings collapse?

10. Look back over the whole passage, from the unmendable flask, through Jeremiah's beating and imprisonment, to the fire in his bones and his raw lament. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus, who Himself suffered for the truth and cried out in anguish yet trusted the Father, is forming endurance, honesty, or courage in you this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 5:11–12, Jesus' blessing on those persecuted and reviled for His sake, the New Covenant counterpart to Jeremiah's suffering; Acts 4:18–20, Peter and John unable to stop speaking what they had seen and heard, the same fire in the bones; Psalm 13:1–6, a lament that moves from "How long, O LORD?" to "I will sing to the LORD," mirroring Jeremiah 20; 2 Corinthians 4:8–9, "afflicted... but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair," the pattern of faith and pain together; Hebrews 12:2–3, fixing our eyes on Jesus who endured the cross, so we "not grow weary or fainthearted."

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