

# Courage • Jeremiah 12:5

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Telemachus*

1. About the year 400 AD, when Honorius was emperor of the Roman Empire, the great Coliseum of Rome was often filled to overflowing with spectators.
2. They came from far and wide to view the games.
3. Part of the sport consisted of watching as human beings battled with wild beasts or against one another until one or the other was killed.
4. The crowd made a holiday of such sport and found its highest delight in the death of a human being.
5. It was on such a day of battle and death that a Christian by the name of Telemachus stood up in the vast arena.
6. He was devastated by the utter disregard for the value of human life
  - a. he stood to his feet and protested, but the people ignored him
  - b. they demanded he shut up and sit down and let them enjoy their entertainment
  - c. so he leaped into the arena in the midst of the gladiatorial show and cried out, "This thing is not right! This thing must stop!"
  - d. because he was interfering with their pleasure, the authorities gave the command for Telemachus to be run through with a sword, which was done.
7. And so, he died.
8. But dying, he ignited a spark.
9. The consciences of those spectators had been pricked
  - a. their cheers at the sight of blood were less loud
  - b. fewer people stood to cheer on the combatants
  - c. and history records that within a few months the games began to decline and soon stopped altogether
8. Why? Because one man dared to speak out and take a stand for what he knew was right.

### B. *History Swings*

1. Was Telemachus foolish to voice his opinion?
  - a. was he naïve to think that one man, in the midst of thousands could have any impact?
  - b. was it a waste for him to jump into the arena?
  - c. certainly he had to know that such an act could mean his own death
  - d. yet he cast himself onto the sandy floor of the Coliseum and pressed his way between the gladiators
  - e. hear his voice crying out to the spectators
  - f. see him with his hands stretched out pleading for a return to sanity
  - g. "This thing is not right! This thing must stop!"
  - h. then see his lifeless body, with his blood spilling onto the sand
2. Was he foolish, naïve. No!

3. He was courageous
    - a. he knew the risk he was taking
    - b. be sure his heart pumped wildly as he first sat in the stands and saw a gladiator put to death
    - c. he was shocked – horrified, not just at the death, but at the crowds reaction!
    - d. and as he thought of what to do, how to respond, the thought came to protest
    - e. but he knew he would be opposed, he knew they would shout him down
    - f. so his heart beat fast as he weighed the options
    - g. but his conscience demanded action and he stood – a lone voice calling for a moment of sanity in an insane world!
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4. It seems that history swings around the lives of those unique men and women who will dare the odds and take a stand
  5. It moves around those few who have dared to say “No” to convention and the status quo and “yes” to living *out* their convictions.
  6. And Telemachus would tell us this morning that courage is *not* the absence of fear
  7. It is doing what our conscience demands in spite of fear
  8. Courage is *faith* applied to the difficult task of living in a world hostile to God
  9. And if there is a virtue God’s people need in this day, it’s courage!

## II. TEXT

### A. *Set The Scene*

1. Jeremiah 11 and 12 are still fairly early in Jeremiah’s career as a prophet
2. He has already spoken of the coming judgment of the nation of Judah by the mighty Babylonians
3. And for this negative message of doom, he has been roundly criticized and rebuked by the elders and peers among the prophets
4. But Jeremiah would not keep silent – he had to be faithful to the Lord’s call
5. One day, the Lord revealed to Jeremiah that the men of his own hometown were plotting to kill him
  - a. they simply couldn’t take the negative message any longer
  - b. don’t like the message? Kill the messenger!
  - c. so they began to formulate their plans to do away with Jeremiah
6. God promised the young prophet that no good would come of their plans
7. God would defend Jeremiah and judge the conspirators
8. After God’s promise of judgment on them, Jeremiah makes a mild complaint to God . . .

### B. *Vs. 1-2*

1. In Isaiah 1:18, God invites people to come and reason with Him
  2. Well, Jeremiah does that here – he says . . .
- <sup>1</sup> **Righteous are You, O LORD, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments.**

3. Something troubles Jeremiah and he wants the Lord to help him understand

**Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?**

**2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth But far from their mind.**

4. God has promised Jeremiah that those wicked men who were conspiring to kill him would be judged.

5. But Jeremiah wants to know WHEN?

a. why didn't God wipe them out the moment they decided to do it?

b. even more, why was it that the men who had devised this evil plan were wealthy & influential ?

6. The prophet is troubled with the seeming inconsistency in God's word and promise

a. on one hand God says evil brings a curse while faithful loyalty and obedience bring blessing

b. so how is it that so often, the wicked seem to live in a mansion while the godly live in a shack?

7. Jeremiah is echoing the same concern as a few others: Job, David, and Asaph, all lamented the seeming reversal of the prosperity of the wicked and the poverty and affliction of the good

8. He goes on . . .

### **C. Vs. 3-4**

**3 But You, O LORD, know me; You have seen me, And You have tested my heart toward You. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, And prepare them for the day of slaughter.**

**4 How long will the land mourn, And the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, For the wickedness of those who dwell there, Because they said, "He will not see our final end."**

1. Jeremiah appeals to the Lord to exercise his judgment on those who have intended him harm

2. Of course, God will judge them in due time

3. The problem is that His time and ours do not line up

4. What we may not realize is that while the enemy intends our ruin, God uses the enemy's opposition as a way to refine and train us

5. And that leads us to v. 5 . . .

### **D. V. 5**

**5 "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?"**

1. Remember, this is all still early in Jeremiah's long career as a prophet

2. So far he's faced some opposition from his peers, the prophets who were universally giving forth a false message of peace and safety

3. And now the problems with the people of his hometown – the conspiracy to kill

him

4. It seems like a big deal to Jeremiah, but from God's perspective, who knows what He has in store for Jeremiah in the years to come, these early troubles are *tiny*
  - a. they are like foot soldiers and one day Jeremiah is going to do battle with mounted knights!
  - b. his early distress is like living in a land of peace, whereas the future will be like living next to the Jordan River when it floods!
5. So the Lord challenges him with a question – Jeremiah, if foot soldiers have wearied you – how will you be able to cope with cavalry?
6. If you complain in the land of peace, what will you do when the flood waters rise?
7. While we can have sympathy for Jeremiah's complaint here, in light of the things that happened to him later, these problems were insignificant!
  - a. here we see the prophets opposing him
  - b. here we see the people of his home town conspiring to kill him
  - c. later he had the chief political and military men of the day opposing him and throwing him in to prison
  - d. the king himself would even devise a way to get rid of him
  - e. and then, finally, the Babylonians would arrive and lay waste to the land!
8. But still, at this point – Jeremiah's problems seemed big
9. And that's the point this passage teaches us

### **E. Growing**

1. We are all at different stages of spiritual growth
2. Some of us are novices, other are veterans
3. It doesn't matter where we are on that timeline of spiritual growth – where ever we are right now we are faced with obstacles, problems, trials, and challenges that weary us
4. But as we trust in God and lean on His strength, He brings us through into victory
5. And looking back, we can probably say that many of the things that once seemed so difficult and wearied us so, in light of where we are now, weren't really as difficult and wearisome as we thought they were.
6. Experience has taught us that God is faithful and His strength sufficient to meet our needs.
7. And we are stronger, more experienced, and less easily wearied than we used to be.
8. It was those early lessons, those footmen, that helped train us and prepare us to battle with today's horsemen.
9. Jeremiah never would have been able to face the priests if he hadn't first faced the prophets
10. He never would have been able to confront the King of Judah if he hadn't first faced the mayor of his hometown
11. And you and I will never be able to face the challenges of tomorrow unless we're faithful in dealing with the challenges of today.

## **F. Courage**

1. What God was developing in Jeremiah was courage
2. The devil was seeking to discourage and dishearten the young prophet
3. So he used rejection by his peers, and when that didn't work, he used the threat of his own friends and relatives
4. Sure God could have easily just fried these opponents as soon as they entertained the thought, and that's what Jeremiah wanted God to do
5. But God allowed it so that Jeremiah's courage would be built up
6. There is no need for courage unless we are challenged
7. Courage isn't the absence of fear – it's carrying on in the face of it!
8. It's pushing aside the weariness and that little voice that says to give up and give in because the challenge is too great and the benefits of victory too slim.
9. Courage is knowing what is right, and allowing nothing to hinder doing it – regardless of the pay off
10. Peter Cartwright was a nineteenth-century circuit-riding Methodist preacher,
  - a. he was known for his uncompromising convictions.
  - b. one Sunday morning when he was to preach, he was told that President Andrew Jackson was in the congregation, and warned not to say anything out of line.
  - c. when Cartwright stood to preach, he said, "I understand that Andrew Jackson is here. I have been requested to be guarded in my remarks. Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent."
  - d. the congregation was shocked and wondered how the President would respond.
  - e. after the service, President Jackson shook hands with Peter Cartwright and said, "Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world."
11. The army of God needs to be filled out with men and women of courage
  - a. people who will not only take a stand for what is right
  - b. but who, like Peter Cartwright and Telemachus will dare to speak up
12. In 2 Timothy 1 we read . . .

### **<sup>7</sup> God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.**

- a. fear is not from God
  - b. oh sure, the fear of God Himself is right and good
  - c. but if we genuinely fear God, then we will not fear anything or anyone else
  - d. why? Because God has not given us a spirit, an attitude, a disposition of fear
  - e. what He *has* given us is a spirit, an attitude and a disposition of power and love and a mind that is not fragmented and torn apart by the terror of things that threaten us
13. If we really believe in God and in His power and love for us, then the things that stand in the way of our obedience to Him will fade away
  14. We see this in the life of Jonathan, King Saul's son and the friend of David
    - a. one day Jonathan and his armor bearer were alone
    - b. they were just down hill from a Philistine garrison
    - c. as they sat there and Jonathan mulled over the war with the Philistines and

- why it was that this enemy was able to occupy the Promised Land when it had been given to the Jews,
- d. it hit him that if God had already given the land to him and his people, then it didn't take an entire army to unseat the invaders from their positions
  - e. if God had already made the promise, all that was needed was one man who would lay claim and go forward in faith
  - f. but Jonathan wanted to make sure he was thinking right and that God did indeed intend to give him that outpost at that moment
  - g. so he said to his armor bearer, "Look, the Lord can deliver by many or by one – numbers don't matter if God is involved."
  - h. "So, here's what we'll do: We'll call out to the Philistine watchmen and say, "Hey wanna fight?""
  - i. "If they say, 'Sure, we'll be right down,'" then we'll take that as a sign that today is not the day God intends to give us this outpost and we'll retreat."
  - j. "But if they say 'Sure, come on up,'" then we'll take that as a sign that God has given us a green light and we'll go make some Philistine salsa."
  - k. and you know what happened – the Philistines *called them up*.
15. Now, what would you have done right at that point?
- a. that was the crisis moment for Jonathan and his armor bearer
  - b. that was when the threat of fear would have been keenest
  - c. let's face it, most of us would say – "Best 2 out of 3."
  - d. we would have asked for *another* sign, one even more specific
  - e. but that's not what Jonathan did
  - f. he pushed his fear aside and scrambled up the hill
  - g. and he secured a great victory for Israel that day – he and his armor bearer!
  - h. two men against dozens
  - i. because if God is for us, who can be against us?
  - j. and one with God is always the majority

## **F. Press On**

1. Friend, God never calls us to some step of obedience that He doesn't also give us all the power and love we need to do it
2. Where ever He guides, He also provides
3. Don't become weary in the face of opposition
4. Realize that today's challenge is training that is making you stronger for something greater.
  - a. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness learning how to shepherd sheep so that he might better shepherd the flock of God
  - b. David did the same with his father's flock in preparation to lead the nation
  - c. it was his battles with the bear and lion that prepared him to face Goliath
5. In the same way, today's victories are preparing us for tomorrow's challenges
6. If we wimp out and give in to weariness and surrender, then we only delay the lesson and make ourselves into spiritual midgets
7. I have met many people of large physical stature who were in fact *small* men and women
8. Rather than pressing through the trials and problems of life, fear paralyzed them

and they retreated behind a wall of the familiar and comfortable  
9. In his concluding remarks in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul wrote . . .

**<sup>13</sup> Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.**

10. The healthy Christian is one who has courage

11. Without it, we will not move forward

12. And if we are not moving forward, then it is certain we are moving backward

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Joshua

1. Joshua lived at a critical moment in the history of Israel

2. Moses had retired from leading the nation, yet they still had one last stage in their journey to the Promised land – they had to cross the Jordan River and face the armies of the Canaanites

3. After the 40 years of Moses' dynamic and miraculous leadership, Joshua had some pretty big sandals to fill – for the task fell to him to take the people into the Promised Land

4. There on the eastern side of the Jordan, with the nation poised to complete its journey, Joshua realized the task was too big for him and he began to panic

5. God came to him with these words . . . [Joshua 1]

**<sup>2</sup> “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.**

**<sup>3</sup> Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.**

**<sup>4</sup> From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.**

**<sup>5</sup> No man shall *be able to stand before you all the days of your life*; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.**

**<sup>6</sup> Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.**

**<sup>7</sup> Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.**

**<sup>8</sup> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.**

**<sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”**

6. Friends the reason why God kept telling Joshua to *not be afraid* but to be strong and of good courage was because at that moment, we was scared!

7. But God gives Joshua the reason why fear is inappropriate – “I will be with

you!”

8. Jesus said to His followers just before He ascended into heaven –

**Go and make disciples of all nations, . . . and I will be with you, even to the end of the age.**

9. If *we* really believed this – what would we *not* do and dare for the glory of God?

### ***B. God Is With Us!***

1. A story is told of a child who had to walk each evening past a dark, spooky house.
2. Some adults sought to give him courage.
  - a. one handed him a good luck charm to ward off the ghosts.
  - b. another had a light put on the dreaded corner.
  - c. still another said earnestly, "It is sinful to be afraid."
  - d. then someone said, "I know what it is to be afraid. I will walk with you past the house."
  - e. he did nothing to remove the fear -- except to lift it from the child's shoulders and place it on his own.
3. Here is why we can live courageously – God goes with us!