

RUNNING WITH THE HORSES

Jeremiah 12:5 *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?*

Introduction: When I was working at the race track there was an interesting race promoted. There was a runner who wanted to challenge a quarterhorse to a race. He challenged the horse to a ¼ mile race with the horse giving the runner a head start of 1/8 of a mile, which was ½ of the race. As I remember the horse won. In 2007 a Cincinnati Bengal football player raced a thoroughbred horse to a race of 1/8 mile and the player, Chad Johnson, was given a 100 meter head start. The horse lost. Both of the races were not fair in some ways but there has always been a challenge to run a race with a horse. It will always be unfair because the horse has two more legs than man and when he gets started can our run a man easily.

Our text is about a man who is told he is in training to run with the horses and that is Jeremiah. The story is one of great interest to us today because it gives us some principles which God wants to incorporate in our lives if we will pay attention.

Jeremiah was from a town called Anathoth (**Jeremiah 1:1; 11:21**). It was a town assigned to the Levites as Jeremiah was a member of the priestly tribe of Levi. **Jeremiah 1:1 (KJV)** *The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.* Jeremiah had been a faithful spokesman for the Lord and yet he had fallen on difficult times with the people of Judah and especially Anathoth. This section of the scripture can be a great source of encouragement as we face some similar things that Jeremiah faced. I have an outline that will help us work through this passage and get to the message. It is important for us to see the progress so we can understand the text we read at the beginning. Note with me:

- 1. THE PLIGHT OF JEREMIAH, Jeremiah 11:18-12.** This is an appeal by Jeremiah to God about the situation he is facing which we will see in a moment.
- 2. THE PLEA OF JEREMIAH, Jeremiah 12:1-4.**
 - a. The anguish of Jeremiah.
 - b. The attitude of the people.
- 3. THE PROPOSAL OF GOD, Jeremiah 12:5-6.** This brings us to the text where we want to demonstrate the way God is helping Jeremiah understand the things that are happening to him and what he has to look forward to. God is telling Jeremiah that he has been faithful in the commission given him at the beginning of his call to ministry. God is telling Jeremiah that he needs to prepare to face the future. That is what the text of **Jeremiah 12:5 (KJV)** *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of*

Jordan? God is reminding Jeremiah about the past and what took place there. A footman was a soldier who went about on foot. They were the infantry. A soldier who is an infantryman has the ability to go long distances on foot and still be able to fight the battle. Jeremiah is being reminded by God of the difficulties he had with the footmen and asking him how he will make it when the horses begin to be his competition.

We can look at this verse in a couple of ways but I want to focus on one. When a person sees the statement at the end of this verse, “**then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?**” they immediately think God is preparing Jeremiah for the future day when he dies. We do that because we sing the song, “I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.” That song is talking about when a person dies. **This passage is not about dying but about living.** God is telling Jeremiah that he has been faithful in proclaiming the truth of God and the people have turned against him what, is he going to do when the way is a lot tougher. There are a couple of things I want us to learn from this text today.

1. Recognizing the Past, Jeremiah 12:5. The past has been a difficult time in Jeremiah’s life. To this point Jeremiah has been faithful to the task given him by God and that was to go to the people and proclaim the message of God. Jeremiah has been faithful. He has preached with power and vigor. Yet his messages have fallen on the ears of those who did not want to hear what he said. They shunned his message and turned away from God. Look at **Jeremiah 6:27-28 (KJV)** ²⁷ *I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way.* ²⁸ *They are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders: they are brass and iron; they are all corrupters.* Being a preacher of the message of God is not always a successful task. Jeremiah found that his message fell on deaf ears. The people were not willing to heed the message he was bringing them from God. They would listen but their lifestyle was not going to change. Ever seen that before? Look at **Jeremiah 7:28 (KJV)** *But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.* [Emphasis added.] This section is the conclusion of the messages Jeremiah delivered to the people of Judah. When we get to **Jeremiah 13** there is a dramatic change in the message. The significant thing about this section is that it concludes with the people of Anathoth wanting, yea threatening to kill him (see **Jeremiah 11:21**). This brings Jeremiah to a turning point in his ministry. It is as if God is saying to him, Jeremiah, how are you going to do when things get harder? The future looked bleak for Jeremiah and how was he going to respond.

It almost reminds us of the Apostle Paul when he made the statement in **Philippians 3:9-14 (KJV)** ⁹ *And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:* ¹⁰

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; ¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. ¹² Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is almost that God is saying this to Jeremiah. **What is your goal in life Jeremiah?** Is it to be safe and live in tranquility? Or is it to press on? Notice that Paul makes an interesting statement in **verse 10**, *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death*. May I ask you a question? How are you doing in the “fellowship of his sufferings? If we look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see the opposition He faced over and over again, yet he pressed on to the task at hand and the purpose He had in being where He was. Do you see yourself in that light?

God is saying to Jeremiah, “If the past has been tough, how are you going to handle the future which has a lot more difficulty in store?” Do you know what Jeremiah faced? If you read the rest of Jeremiah you find that his message gets harsher and more specific.

Look at **Jeremiah 22:26 (KJV)** *And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die.* **Jeremiah 23:39 (KJV)** *Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence:* **Jeremiah 28:16 (KJV)** *Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD.* Do you know what the result of this kind of preaching was? Look at **Jeremiah 38:6 (KJV)** *Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.* Now, do you think Jeremiah would have been willing to go forward if he knew what lay in store for him? We do not know. But God did not tell him what the future held in specific words. He simply ask Jeremiah, if you get weary in running with the footmen, how will you do when you compete with the horses?

- 2. Revelation of the Future, Jeremiah 12:5.** We need to learn as Jeremiah was to learn and that is, “Facing the Future.” There are two things we need to learn about this.
 - a. To face the future there needs to be a confidence in God.** This section builds somewhat on what we discussed last week. We looked at the “Promise of a Wonderful Future.” We took that from **Jeremiah 11:5 (KJV)** *That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto*

your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as *it is this day*. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD. God was giving a reminder to the people and to Jeremiah that there has always been a promise of a wonderful future. For Judah that was a temporal future and physical provisions. Our future will be filled with the presence of God in a place called heaven. In this text God is taking Jeremiah back to reality and talking about how he is going to face what lies ahead in the days he has remaining on this earth. We might ask the same question to you and me. How are we going to face the future and what may lie ahead if you cannot trust the Lord for the future? Paul said in **Philippians 3:14 (KJV)** *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. This is to be the attitude of a believer. Yet, we are much like Jeremiah. He had a threat of the people of Anathoth. The people threatened to kill him if he did not stop prophesying in the name of the Lord. Look at **Jeremiah 11:21 (KJV)** *Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophecy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand*. Jeremiah can be glad that God is on his side. Look at **Jeremiah 11:22 (KJV)** *Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine*.

When God is on your side, you and God make a majority. You cannot lose with God as your advisor and defender. God is saying to Jeremiah, just trust me, I will take care of your enemies. When Paul went to God with his “thorn in the flesh” he saw it as a “messenger of Satan” with the goal of buffeting him. Notice the goal in **2**

Corinthians 12:7 (KJV) *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure*. Evidently Paul ran the risk of gaining a bit of pride in the way the Lord was dealing with him. What God was telling Paul and I believe Jeremiah as well. You have trusted me for the small things, will you trust me for the big things? Listen to **1 Peter 4:12 (KJV)** *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you*. Listen to **Psalms 18:2 (KJV)** *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower*.

- b. To face the future there needs to be a confidence of man.** In other words what God is saying to Jeremiah (and to us) is, “Jeremiah, will you trust me for the future?” Can God be trusted? This is the question. Does man have the confidence to trust God for what lies ahead? From this point on in the book of Jeremiah things get much harder for the prophet. God is preparing him for what lies ahead and asking the question, “Will you trust Me?” Another prophet made this statement in **Nahum 1:7 (KJV)** *The LORD is good, a strong hold in*

the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. The apostle made this statement in **2 Corinthians 1:9 (KJV)** **But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God** which raiseth the dead: [Emphasis added.]. Who are you trusting? The arm of flesh will fail you. There has to be a trust in God for the future.

What we do is try to manipulate the future. We try to direct the circumstances in which we find ourselves so we can get the result we desire. God does not operate that way. Only God controls the future and when we try to manipulate it we will be frustrated. There has to be a point in our lives where we need to trust the Lord and exercise FAITH!!! How are you doing?