

**“If You Have Run With the Footmen...”**  
**By Paul R. Blake**

Even the most devout of God’s servants feel overwhelmed from time to time, and ask God why it must be so. Job pleaded with God from the depth of his suffering: “I cry out to You, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You regard me. But You have become cruel to me; With the strength of Your hand You oppose me” (Job 30:20-21). Jesus made the plaintive appeal from the cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46).

Jeremiah appears to be weary of what he perceives to be an injustice, that God is blessing the wicked instead of punishing them. He begins with a bit of peremptory flattery of God’s righteousness and then segues immediately into questioning the judgment of God. “Righteous are You, O LORD, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments” (Jer. 12:1a). Perhaps Jeremiah succumbed to the same temptation that afflicts a number of the faithful who patiently endure opposition from the wicked. He may have assumed that his burdens qualified him to gently reprove God for what he believed to be an oversight in God’s treatment of men.

“Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? 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” (Jer. 12:1b-2). The prophet is informing God (as if he has forgotten that God knows everything) that the sinful are not suffering as he thinks they ought. In fact, he places responsibility for this on God and presumes to usurp God’s prerogative of judgment by telling Him what is in their hearts.

Jeremiah proceeds to teach God what He must do to correct His oversight. He reminds God of how good a servant he has been, and on the basis of that, he counsels God to get busy with the work of punishing the wicked. “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” (Jer. 12:3).

To complete his effrontery, Jeremiah explains to God (who knows and sees all things) what is going on in the land of men, that the very earth grieves, the plants wither, and the animals are consumed because God has allowed the injustice of the wicked to persist (Jer. 12:4).

Jehovah allows Jeremiah to finish his unmanly grumbling before powerfully and profoundly putting him in his place. Instead of offering gentle reassurance or soothing encouragement, God says: “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?” (Jer. 12:5). Jeremiah, if your complaining means that you are worn out from doing my work under normal conditions, how will you deal with increases in your burden? If it is too much to carry your load in a peaceful setting, how will you carry it into danger? God then prepares Jeremiah for a worsening of his trials by telling him that his own family will betray him.

There are several lessons in this brief, easily overlooked conversation between God and His prophet. First, God often prepares His servants for greater trials by sending lesser trials in increasing degrees. No one should ever say he has already endured the worst possible thing that could ever happen to him. It may be that there is something more troublesome waiting to unfold.

Second, it is reasonable to assume that greater trouble can be expected. While one should not live with the belief that life will only get worse (nihilism), at the same time he should be prepared for greater burdens when they come. Mental preparation and emotional resignation to the possibility of future hard times is essential to survival.

Third, lesser trials reveal weaknesses that could become grave liabilities under greater trials. If one fails in a lesser trial, he knows that he is not prepared for the greater and will be motivated to develop the strength and skill needed to overcome that weakness before the greater trial comes. If one is truly the child of God he perceives himself to be, he will have enough character to view his failure as an implied rebuke, and he will accept it and profit by it. In addition, when one fails at lesser trials it helps him put greater trials into perspective, increasing his experience and wisdom. It teaches him humility, and humility properly used can be a strong motivator for personal growth. Further, it teaches the man not to whine over the ordinary difficulties of daily life as a Christian.

Fourth, God expects a man to grow to handle the greater trials. God would never place on any man more than he can handle (1Cor. 10:13). Therefore, if He promises to send a greater burden to a man, it is because He expects the man to prepare himself for it. If God increases a man's trials, He does so with Divine knowledge of how much the man can bear. One who rebukes God for increasing his burden impugns the Holy wisdom and judgment of Jehovah, and supplants it with his own fallible, limited reasoning.

Finally, failure at smaller trials teaches one to depend on God for help when the greater trials come. Jesus praised the saints at Philadelphia for expending their "little strength" to remain faithful to Him under trial. He encouraged them with the promise to protect them through the greater trial that would come (Rev. 3:8-10). Despair under trial should only be the lot of one who faces burdens alone. God's children are not alone in suffering; He will take care of them (Heb. 13:5-6; 2Tim. 4:14-18).

Jeremiah presumed to correct God for permitting the righteous to suffer and the wicked to prosper. God reproved him for complaining when times were easy and burdens were light, and He warned Jeremiah that times would get harder to prepare and strengthen him. What would He say to the twenty-first century preacher who complains about how hard it is to reach and teach the lost in this land of freedom? What would He say to the eldership that concedes the battle against worldliness in the local church when so many helpful resources are available to them? How would He speak to the members who whine about attending services and begrudge the time spent in worship and Bible study, especially in view of the ease of commuting to services and comfort of the building? What will our generation do when we are called to run against horses or face lions on the Jordan floodplain? It is time to quit murmuring, grow up, and get back to work.

### **A Moment's Wisdom**

- The minute you settle for less than you deserve, you get even less than what you settled for.
- Achievement is largely the product of steadily raising one's levels of aspiration and expectation.
- The big advantage of the Bible is it's very easy to rewind. Close it and you're right back at the beginning.
- We are made to persist. That's how we find out who we are.
- The greatest good you can do for another is not to just share your riches in Christ, but to reveal to him his own.
- How sad would be November if we had no knowledge of spring. How sad the twilight of life if there is no resurrection morn.
- Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances.
- You can have it all. You just can't have it all at once.
- Humans have the remarkable ability to get exactly what they must have. But there is a difference between a "must" and a "want."
- The best motivation is self-motivation. You might say, "I wish someone would come by and get me started." What if they don't show up? You've got to have a better plan for your life.
- When you know what you want, and you want it bad enough, you will find a way to get it.
- Motivation alone is not enough. If you have an idiot and you motivate him, now you have a motivated idiot.
- Without a sense of urgency, desire loses its value.
- Don't say, "If I could, I would." Say, "If I can, I will."