

Jeremiah 20 — Fire in the Bones, Tears on the Face

1) Blowback at the Temple: Pashhur vs. the Prophet (Jeremiah 20:1–6)

“Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.”
(Jeremiah 20:1–2)

Jeremiah’s temple sermon (Jeremiah 19) is barely finished before the chief officer, **Pashhur**, has him beaten and locked in public stocks—a device that immobilized and shamed. The next day, when Pashhur releases him, Jeremiah renames him:

“The Lord has not called your name Pashhur [‘Prosperity all around’], but **Magor-Missabib** [‘Fear on every side’].” (Jeremiah 20:3, NKJV)

Then comes the verdict:

“For thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies... And you, Pashhur... shall go into captivity... there you shall die... to whom you have prophesied lies.’” (Jeremiah 20:4–6)

Takeaway: Faithful speech can bring painful backlash. Jeremiah does not soften truth to avoid suffering; he names idolatry, warns of exile, and leaves outcomes with God.

2) The Prophet’s Crisis: “I Wanted to Quit” (Jeremiah 20:7–10)

“O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, ‘Violence and plunder!’ Because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily.” (Jeremiah 20:7–8)

Jeremiah opens his heart: “Lord, Your call conquered me, but now it feels like it cost me everything.” He resolves to resign:

“Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.”
(Jeremiah 20:9)

He faces surveillance and slander:

“For I heard many mocking: ‘Fear on every side!’ ‘Report,’ they say, ‘and we will report it.’ All my acquaintances watched for my stumbling, saying, ‘Perhaps he can be induced; then we will prevail against him, and we will take our revenge on him.’” (Jeremiah 20:10)

Takeaway: God’s calling can feel heavy. Yet the **Word** kindled by the **Spirit** refuses to be muzzled. When fear shouts, fire still burns.

3) A Flash of Confidence and a Flood of Lament (Jeremiah 20:11–18)

“But the Lord is with me as a mighty, awesome One. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail... O Lord of hosts, You who test the righteous, and see the mind and heart, let me see Your vengeance on them; for I have pleaded my cause before You. Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers.” (Jeremiah 20:11–13)

Then anguish returns:

“Cursed be the day in which I was born... Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?” (Jeremiah 20:14–18)

Jeremiah swings from praise to pain within a breath. This is not unbelief; it is unedited honesty before God. Scripture does not sanitize the prophet’s fatigue; it sanctifies it by bringing it into prayer.

Theological Reflection (Non-Calvinist, Non-Arminian, Non-Dispensational)

1. God’s sovereignty and human responsiveness coexist without fatalism. God calls; Jeremiah consents; opposition rises; grace sustains. Nothing here implies irresistible compulsion or precarious self-salvation. We see real communion: God addresses; Jeremiah wrestles; the story advances through relationship.
2. Prophetic vocation is relational before it is functional. Jeremiah’s first duty is not to results but to truthful presence with God—speaking what God says and bringing his whole heart (including lament) back to God.
3. Lament belongs to faith. The same chapter that sings (Jeremiah 20:13) also groans (Jeremiah 20:14–18). Faith is not a smile pasted over sorrow; it is fidelity to God **within** sorrow.

Practical Application

1. Name your stocks. Where do ridicule, pressure, or fear silence your witness—workplace, family, school, online? Bring that place to God. Ask for courage to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
2. Do not make pain your pastor. Opposition can drill us into bitterness. Let the Lord be “a mighty, awesome One” with you (Jeremiah 20:11). Pray your anger through God rather than at people (Jeremiah 20:12).
3. Let the Word burn again. If fatigue has cooled your zeal, ask the Spirit to rekindle Scripture in your bones (Jeremiah 20:9). Set a daily, unhurried time to read, meditate, and pray (Psalm 119:25, Psalm 119:50).
4. Practice faithful lament. When despair surges, do what Jeremiah did—bring raw emotions into God’s presence (Psalm 62:8). Lament is not disloyalty; it is the pathway back to praise.
5. Expect swing seasons. If you move from song to sigh in the same day, you are not broken; you are biblical. Anchor your soul in God’s character, not today’s circumstances (Lamentations 3:21–24).

A Challenge for Believers

- **Courage:** Where the culture demands flattery, speak the truth graciously. Refuse both cruelty and compromise.
- **Constancy:** When weariness whispers “quit,” remember the fire. Ask God for resilience, not merely relief.
- **Charity:** Pray for those who oppose you. Leave vengeance with God (Romans 12:17–21). Let holiness and love walk together.

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.” (First Corinthians 16:13–14)

An Invitation to Non-Believers

Perhaps you feel like Jeremiah—tired, misunderstood, torn between hope and despair. Jesus Christ knows your story and invites you to come to Him. On the cross He carried our sin and shame; by His resurrection He proclaims forgiveness and new life.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (First John 1:9)

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)

Pray sincerely:

“Lord Jesus, I come to You weary and sinful. I believe You died for my sins and rose again. Forgive me, cleanse me, and make me new. Be my Lord and Savior. Place Your Word like fire in my heart and lead me in Your ways. I surrender to You. Amen.”

If you prayed this from your heart, tell a mature Christian, be baptized in water, and join a Bible-teaching study group. Begin to read the Gospel of John and ask the Lord to speak to you each day.

Summary

Jeremiah 20 shows a prophet in stocks and in tears, yet still aflame with God’s Word. The chapter assures us that honest lament and steadfast obedience can live in the same heart. When persecution rises and courage wanes, the Lord remains “a mighty, awesome One” with His people (Jeremiah 20:11). Cling to Him. Let His Word burn again. And keep going.