

BaptistWay Bible Series for August 7: Jeremiah: Being faithful in the depths of despair

July 26, 2011

There is a children's book titled *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*.

The young boy named Alexander wakes up to a day of misfortune and frustration. Some of the problems are caused by his own acts of clumsiness, while others are a result of his poor decisions. Many of the problems that occurred were no one's fault, and could be characterized as bad luck. Throughout the book, Alexander comments that he would just like to move to Australia in order to escape the bad day he is having. At the end of the book, Alexander's mother tells him sometimes bad days happen, even in Australia.

Many different events and circumstances can make a day or time of our life difficult and bad. Most of the time we are able to overcome these difficult days. I think we all understand that there will be times in our lives that are hard to handle. We even make light about some of these periods in our lives.

For example, how many times do we laugh about decisions made during a midlife crisis or joke about dealing with adolescent children. We usually understand and can deal with the bad days of life; but when our bad days are caused by doing what God has asked us to do, we may feel like Alexander, and our bad day turns into a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

I think as Christians, we tend to believe that if we do what God asks us to

do, everything will go well. Some pastors will go so far as to say you will be blessed financially if you do what God asks of you. Others do not go that far, but will say that you will find contentment and happiness when you follow God's commands.

There is no doubt that true joy, peace and contentment come from living a life in fellowship with God, but there will be days where joy, peace and contentment are nowhere to be found. In fact, there will be days where following God's commands are the cause of your very bad day.

Jeremiah 20:7-18 records one of the prophet's laments toward God. Jeremiah is brutally honest with God and proclaims God deceived him. To make matters worse, Jeremiah knows that if he does not do what God has asked of him, things will be even worse.

Briefly, in verses 11-13, Jeremiah remembers God is on his side and he praises God, but then quickly falls back into cursing the day he was born. These types of laments are uncomfortable to read. Shouldn't a prophet called by God be stronger than this? Can you really talk to God like that?

Jeremiah expresses the emotions many of us are scared to admit we have. When you try to live your life for God, things will not be easy. At times, you will want to give up and quit, but deep down you cannot resist the call of God on your life.

We live in a society motivated by rewards. We reward our children for good behavior, we reward a good employee with raises and we have elaborate award ceremonies to reward people for their accomplishments. We are conditioned to expect a reward when we do what is expected of us.

We take this reward mentality with us when we commit ourselves to serving the Lord. If we just follow God's commands and live for him, we should be rewarded, right? This is just not true. Our reward may not come during our earthly life.

Jeremiah was not motivated by any reward, but by the relationship he had with God. In chapter 26, Jeremiah continues to speak the Lord's word even under the threat of death. Jeremiah's focus was not on people or circumstances, but on God.

When we begin to focus on how people may be treating us or how bad our circumstances are, we take our focus off God, and our day may move from bad to terrible. Like Jeremiah, we need to make our relationship with God more important than anything else.

We can learn from Jeremiah's circumstances. Understand that just being faithful to God does not mean everything will run smoothly, and you will live happily ever after. Learn to focus on God rather than your circumstances. Your relationship with God should be your motivation, not some reward you have hoped for.

Remember to reach out to God for strength. Jeremiah reached out to God in ways we sometimes are afraid to explore. The laments of Jeremiah put God on the spot and lay out all of Jeremiah's fears, frustrations and anger. I think Jeremiah's honesty with God provided him the strength he needed to continue to proclaim God's word in a hostile environment.

God is bigger than our doubts, fears, frustrations and anger. We should be willing to give those things to him so we can receive the strength he has for us. There will be bad and maybe even terrible days, but God will give you the strength to continue serving him each and every day.