

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Against the Flow

(studies in Jeremiah)

Suffering

(selected passages from Jeremiah)

Study #6

Introduction: “Health & wealth” - really...?

The San Antonio Spurs, having tasted four NBA Championships since 1999, will be satisfied with nothing but a title at the end of this season’s campaign. Like the Spurs organization, we Spurs fans are spoiled rotten. We know it. We like it that way.

We have high expectations for our basketball team.

Contrast this with my first home-buying experience. It was 1983 and Kathy and I were seeking to purchase a home for our growing family (We moved into our home in Leon Valley days before Ben was born). We were able to lock in a mortgage at 12%. Today that looks like a terrible rate, doesn’t it? But, two years before we bought our home, interest rates had been 20.5%, and a year before we bought (1982), the home mortgage interest rate was hovering around 16%.

Our expectations for getting a good interest rate were quite low.

A history of success and good times breeds high expectations. A history of challenges and hard times leads to lower expectations.

Today, as we think about the life and times of Jeremiah, we’ll consider expectations you and I bring to life and especially to the life of faith.

First, let’s think about what are some realistic expectations we bring to our non-religious life. None of us expect that life will be a bowl of cherries all the time. Into each of our lives tough stuff must come, right?

Standing for God Isn’t Easy

Called to Something Tough

Your tough things

You’ve got your share of tough assignments.

If you are heading off to work tomorrow morning, you’re going to get assignments. Some of them will be difficult to perform. That’s why they call it “work.”

School teaches most of us early on that without diligent study, failure is just around the corner. School can be tough.

Home is another arena where life can be tough. Marriage was intended by God to be a laboratory in which there is both joy and growth. We get the joy part. Growth is a bit dicier. Growth, in my experience, usually occurs at the cost of comfort as it often involves pain.

The best marriages are a result of deep emotional involvement, a willingness to work through problems, and a refusal to quit. Marriage is usually a tough assignment!

And on and on we could go. Child-rearing is tough. Relating to parents is tough. Learning a sport is tough

Life is not a walk in the park for any of us - and it wasn’t for the prophet Jeremiah, either. His life has been a fascinating open book study for us in recent weeks, and it is plain to see that he was given a really tough assignment. That life assignment is spelled out in the sixth chapter of his book.

Jeremiah’s tough thing

[6:27] “I have made you an assayer and a tester among My people, That you may know and assay their way.”

When someone is testing a chunk of precious metal to see how much of that chunk is solid gold and how much is dross, we say that they are “assaying” it.¹

Jeremiah’s task - given to him by God - was to “assay” the Jewish people and to find out how pure were their hearts toward God and how much in their hearts was so much worthless dross and junk.

That was a tough assignment! Can’t you just imagine that carrying out this assignment made Jeremiah VERY popular!? Not hardly!!

He would have been about as popular as the auditor who assesses your department and reports that you and your group are inefficient. Or as popular as a whistle-blower who reports to the boss that there is graft and corruption in your office.

Jeremiah had a very tough job. No question about it. But God gave him this very tough job, knowing full well that it would be tough. God continues to give His people tough assignments to this day.

Tough “God things” today

If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you have been assigned to be a witness to the truth of the Gospel to your friends and family, co-workers and fellow students.

You have also been assigned to live with honesty and integrity. You have been assigned to pray and to know your Bible, to love your spouse if you are married, to respect and obey your parents, to submit to the Bible’s teachings on sexual purity, to love your enemies, turn the other cheek - and more.

All of this is tough stuff!

There comes a point for each of us when we recognize that these assignments are beyond us. At that point we do what Jeremiah did. We turn to the Lord.

¹ Gold was refined in those days by melting down lead with the rest of the metal. Then, a stream of air was directed at the molten mass. This oxidized the lead, causing it to act as a flux to carry off the baser elements.

Knowing Who to Turn To

[Jeremiah 15:15] You who know, O Lord, Remember me, take notice of me...

When facing tough things, it is important to turn to the Lord. We need His strength to keep on keeping on, to persevere in doing good.

When we finally recognize that a “CAN DO!” mindset can’t do it, when we come to the end of our ability to carry out God’s assignments, we can rejoice because our inability serves to remind us that we need to trust in and depend on God!

Jeremiah consistently turned to the Lord when he faced trouble. And did he ever face trouble!

For the next few minutes we’re going to look at the tough stuff that this man of God faced. I think we’ll each learn a lot about Jeremiah, in particular. But I also think that we’ll each find sobering encouragement to face the tough stuff in our own lives after we see the way Jeremiah handled them in his own life.

The first hardship we’ll see has to do with his domestic life.

The Sufferings of Jeremiah

Denied the Pleasures of a Family

[Jeremiah 16:1] The word of the Lord also came to me saying, [2] “You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons or daughters in this place.”² [3] For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bear them, and their fathers who beget them in this land: [4] “They will die of deadly diseases, they will not be lamented or buried; they will be as dung on the surface of the ground and come to an end by sword and famine, and their carcasses will become food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth.”

² A very emphatic command. Same kind of negative as found in the Ten Commandments.

Prophets and their families

The Bible tells us that other prophets had interesting and often unfortunate family lives. Hosea's wife continually strayed. Ezekiel's beloved wife died.

The message of these prophets' home lives was to be a message to the nation. Hosea's wife's adulteries were a living parable of Israel's spiritual harlotries. Ezekiel was commanded to not weep or mourn the passing of his wife, illustrating that God was not going to mourn when His own beloved people went away into captivity.

The message of Jeremiah's family-less status

God told Jeremiah to not take a wife and to not have children.³ Just as had been with the case with Ezekiel and Hosea, so there was a "point" to Jeremiah's family-less status.

He was to forego having a family of his own because of the widespread calamity that was coming on Jerusalem and Judah. A time of carnage was not a time to embrace a wife or to bring children into the world. His celibacy was a proclamation that the end of Judah was at hand.

In the verses I just read, some of the grim consequences of war are spelled out. Men and women alike perish. There will be no burials - and this will contribute to the diseases that will kill as fiercely as the sword.

There is nothing metaphorical in the description. It is a realistic picture of war and its aftermath.

Jeremiah's singleness was to prompt repentance.

Having a wife and children would be a heavy burden to bear, especially during a difficult period. The prophet will be spared watching his wife and children killed.

But he will also never enjoy the delights of a family.

The pain of Jeremiah's family-less status

No times around the fireplace late at night. No wife to snuggle up to and embrace. No children to love, train, discipline and launch.

Then, beyond the personal loss, there would have been the social stigma of singleness.

In our culture today, of course, an unmarried man or woman is not unusual. However, in ancient Israel and throughout the Ancient Near East the unmarried state was VERY unusual for an adult.⁴

People would have been asking, "*Why isn't that Jeremiah marrying? What an odd young man!*" Answer, "*Oh, he thinks the world is going to end...*" followed by raucous laughter.

A prohibition against having a family of his own is the first of the sufferings of Jeremiah I'm mentioning today, but it is by no means the last.

He also endured several plots to either end his life or to impugn his ministry. There was, first, "The Anathoth Conspiracy."

Plots Against Him

The Anathoth conspiracy (11:18-23)

[11:18] Moreover, the Lord made it known to me and I knew it; Then You showed me their deeds...

[11:21] Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, saying, "Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, so that you will not die at our hand"

We saw this last week. The people he grew up with, his hometown friends, even his family, plotted together to do away with him. And why did they plot to do away with him? They did it simply because he was being faithful to proclaim the word of the Lord.

³ All three of these family events were proclamations of the Word of God.

⁴ An ancient Sumerian proverb held celibacy to be a curse. Referenced in Thompson's commentary.

Can you imagine how this would have hurt, the emotions he would have experienced, the abandonment he would have felt, when, as a young man, he was targeted by a hit put out by the people who should have been his strongest supporters?

Oh, and I said “plots” - plural. Another plot is mentioned later on. Let’s call it “The Potters’ House Conspiracy.”

The “potters house” conspiracy (18:18)

[18:18] Then they said, “Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike at him with our tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words.”

From a priest, you would expect a ruling on the Law; from a sage, something wise about politics or how to live well; from a prophet, a word of the Lord for the day.

And Jeremiah had been relentless in his condemnation of all three of these classes of people.

It is very likely that these three groups instigated this conspiracy against Jeremiah. And we hear what they are saying.

“Jeremiah’s not the only prophet in town. There are plenty of others speaking (or claiming to speak) for God. We’ll just listen to them - forget Jeremiah!”

The people will pay no attention to him. They will simply ignore what he has to say.

Yet one more conspiracy is uncovered, this time from the priests and prophets against Jeremiah.

The priest’s conspiracy (26:1-24)

At the first part of chapter 26, Jeremiah brought the by now familiar prophesied about Judah’s destruction. After he spoke, priests and prophets seized him.

[26:8] When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, “You must die! [9] “Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord saying, ‘This house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant?’” And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.⁵

How terrifying! He is surrounded by an angry mob in the Temple. They want to kill him. And all he has done has been to say exactly what the Lord told him to say. People who should have been most interested to hear what the Lord has to say have threatened to kill him!

In addition to these plots against him, there was additional suffering in Jeremiah’s life.

Imagine the pain of giving your life to proclaim God’s message - and then having your life’s work go up in smoke. That happened to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah’s Message Was Not Received (chapter 36)

In the fourth year of the reign of the Jewish king, Jehoiakim, the Lord spoke to Jeremiah. God told him to take a scroll and write on it all the words that He had spoken to Jeremiah from the very beginning.

All of the prophecies were then to be read out loud, first to the king, and then to the people. The hope, of course, was that the Jews would hear about the calamity that God had planned and would do to Him.

⁵ Jeremiah confirmed to those who wanted to put him to death that he had been sent by the Lord to prophecy and that they could do with him as they wished BUT that they would bring innocent blood on themselves by doing so. (26:10-15) At that point, the death sentence was lifted and Micah of Moresheth prophesied similarly to the words of Jeremiah about Judah’s destruction. (26:16-19) Another man, Uriah, also prophesied the same things Jeremiah had prophesied about Judah’s destruction, then fearing King Jehoiakim Uriah fled to Egypt, but Jehoiakim brought him back and killed Uriah. (26:20-23) Jeremiah was protected from harm by Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. (26:24)

So, Jeremiah dictated to his friend (and secretary) Baruch all of the words that God had spoken to him. He then commanded Baruch to take the scroll and read it out loud in the house of the Lord.⁶

As commanded, Baruch, having written down all of Jeremiah's prophecies on scrolls, went to the Temple and read the words out loud in the house of the Lord.

This reading created such a stir that one of the priests, Micaiah, called for a command performance for the king. Baruch was escorted to the royal palace and read Jeremiah's prophecies out loud to Jehoiakim.

At the end of the reading, rather than repent in sackcloth and ashes (as the people of Nineveh did at the preaching of Jonah!) the king of Judah cut the scrolls in pieces and threw them into the fire (despite the protests of his officials that he not do so).⁷ Jeremiah and Baruch were warned to hide themselves since the king would no doubt now want them killed!

I'm confident that Jeremiah experienced tremendous pain in not being listened to - especially since he knew full well that he was proclaiming the word of the Lord!⁸

In addition to experiencing this particular kind of pain, Jeremiah knew the other kind of pain, too. The physical kind.

⁶ Jeremiah was at this point, "restricted" from going to the Temple.

⁷ When it was told Jeremiah what Jehoiakim had done with the scroll, the Lord told Jeremiah to write all the words down again, with an addendum consisting of a decree that no descendant of Jehoiakim would ever sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem. (36:27-31) Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch again. (36:32)

⁸ Another instance of Jeremiah not being listened to is recorded in chapter 42. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah after ten days of waiting and He told Jeremiah that He would prosper the people in the land and that they were not to fear the king of Babylon but they are warned that if they go to Egypt then they will fall by the sword, by famine and pestilence and there will be no survivors. The people were warned to pay attention to Jeremiah's words. But after Jeremiah finished speaking, several men accused him of lying and argued for going down to Egypt and the commanders listened to these men instead of Jeremiah and they did go down to Egypt. (42:7--1-7)

The first time we are told of physical suffering, it was directly because of his role as a prophet and came directly by the hand of a respected priest.

Physical Suffering

Pashhur beat Jeremiah

[20:1] When Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, [2] Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the Lord.⁹

Pashhur heard Jeremiah's preaching (see chapter 19). The message he heard was the message of the shattered jar. In this message, Jeremiah said that God would shatter Judah just as completely as he was shattering the pottery jar he held in his hands.¹⁰

Pashhur was offended by the message that calamity was coming against Jerusalem and decided that Jeremiah should be punished.

So, Pashhur, the overseer of the priests, made plans to take action against God's overseer!

First of all, there was a beating. We are not given any details of this beating. But we can suspect that it was a severe beating.

The Jewish Law said that a beating could consist of no more than forty lashes (lest, as Moses said, ***[Deuteronomy 25:3]...your brother is not degraded in your eyes.***). I imagine Pashhur's rage ensured that Jeremiah was beaten with as many as the Law would allow.

We don't know if Pashhur was actually the one who beat Jeremiah or if he assigned that chore to someone else. But it was definitely at Pashhur's command that Jeremiah was beaten.

⁹ Pashhur was well within his rights to punish someone he thought to be a false prophet. BUT, Jeremiah's prophesying was true, so the story condemns Pashhur.

¹⁰ Jeremiah was really big on object lessons

And that beating didn't end Jeremiah's physical suffering. After he had been beaten, Jeremiah was placed in "stocks."

"Stocks" sound, to us, chiefly humiliating. But the Hebrew word is formed from the verb "to twist." The implication is that a "twist-frame" clamped the victim in a position that would become increasingly uncomfortable over time. He was kept in that position all night long.¹¹

So, threats have turned to action, introducing Jeremiah to the long sequence of physical sufferings that awaited him.

The next instance of physical pain occurred when Jeremiah was placed in prison.

Imprisoned

[32:1] The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.¹² [2] Now at that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the house of the king of Judah, [3] because Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, "Why do you prophesy, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take it; [4] and Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but he will surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; [5] and he will take Zedekiah to Babylon, and he will be there until I visit him," declares the Lord. "If you fight against the Chaldeans, you will not succeed" '?"

Jeremiah had prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed. He had also predicted that Zedekiah would not escape but would be taken to Babylon to have a terrible face to face meeting with Nebuchadnezzar.¹³

Zedekiah's question of verse 3 is telling, "*Why do you prophesy the way you do?*" - as if Jeremiah had a choice in the matter! As a prophet, he had to speak what God told him to speak.

Some, though, because he prophesied destruction for Israel, thought that he was deserting to the Babylonians. Some may have even thought that he was in league with the Babylonians.

And Zedekiah's response to Jeremiah's truthful prophecy was to have him arrested and placed in prison.

Finally, at least as far as major physical insults and sufferings are concerned, Jeremiah was thrown into a well.

Thrown into a cistern

[38:4] Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm."¹⁴ [5] So King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." [6] Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king's son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud,¹⁵ and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

By now, the state officials have had it "up to here" with this trouble-making Jeremiah. He is an old man and has been preaching this "gloom and doom" stuff for decades.

his eyes and then Zedekiah was blinded, ensuring that the last thing he saw was the death of his sons and the guarantee of the end of his line as king.

¹⁴ His words were certainly weakening the hands of the soldiers. Imagine how disheartening it would be to have Jeremiah predicting total defeat by the enemy army if you were about to go out and fight! But his words were intended to prompt the king to surrender. If he would do that, the soldiers and the citizens would have been spared.

¹⁵ Does a muddy cistern indicate that the city was running low on water? Probably, as Ebed-melech reported to the king that there was no more bread in the city, either (Jeremiah 38:9)

¹¹ Some have suggested that Jeremiah was confined to a small room used for short detentions. Maybe even a room so small a man couldn't stand up, producing cramped muscles.

¹² Zedekiah's tenth year was 588/587 and synchs up with Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year.

¹³ See 2 Kings 25:4-7 for this face to face meeting. Tragically, Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar with his sons. Zedekiah's sons were killed before

They approached the king (again, Zedekiah) and asked for the death penalty against God's prophet.

When Zedekiah responded, "***Behold, he is in your hands***" they were given the freedom to deal with Jeremiah however they wished.¹⁶

But, they wanted Jeremiah dead without their having to actually get their hands dirty. So, they decided that Jeremiah should die a slow and painful death at the bottom of a cistern.

A cistern was a water storage pit dug out of limestone rock. It normally had a bulbous shape, wider at the bottom than at the top. As a result, getting down into a cistern was difficult. Hence, the use of ropes to lower him down into the cistern.

Normally, this scenario would mean that he would live as long as he could tread water. But there was no water in the cistern, only mud. The Bible tells us that Jeremiah "***sank into the mud.***"

What a horrible way to die! The pit would have been the site of a long, lingering, revolting death.¹⁷

In the end, Jeremiah was rescued by a loyal friend. His life was spared and he continued to speak the word of God with all boldness.

But consider what we have just witnessed.

God's man, His holy prophet, faithfully speaking exactly what God told him to speak, suffered terrifically for that faithfulness.

He endured ridicule, loneliness, loss of hope for a normal family life and rejection. He was ostracized, imprisoned, beaten, tortured and left in a muddy cistern to die.

If that somehow doesn't seem quite right, if it seems somehow odd that a prophet should have been so mistreated, we should at least know that it is consistent with what God told Jeremiah to expect. And it is consistent with what God's people have experienced through the ages.

It is also consistent with what the Bible has told us to expect.

The Sufferings of the People of God

New Testament Promises

Please listen as I read a few verses aimed at arming us with knowledge of what we can expect in this life, for faithfully following Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of Jesus' beloved Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), we find the Beatitudes. Have you ever noticed how much these beautiful beatitudes have to say about persecution and suffering?

[5:10] "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[5:11] "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

[12] "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Later on, Jesus had something else to say about our response whenever people might treat us harshly for His sake.

[5:44] "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

The Gospel of Mark records one of the Lord's comments about persecution, too.

[Mark 10:29] Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, [30] but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

¹⁶ The king's capitulation to his princes (v. 5) reminds us of Pilate's hand-washing deliverance of Jesus to be crucified.

¹⁷ The rest of the story is that a loyal friend, Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian eunuch, rescued Jeremiah from the pit. He begged the king - no doubt at some risk to his own life - for permission to rescue Jeremiah. He even thought to put soft rags under Jeremiah's arms to keep him from getting badly cut.

Doctor Luke follows suit.

[Luke 21:12] “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake.

And John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus said this:

[John 15:20] “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Later, after Jesus had died, the apostles were teaching the first converts about what to expect when they followed Jesus. This is what they told them:

[Acts 14:22]... “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

And the apostle Paul, almost a Jeremiah of the New Testament, had lots to say about suffering for Jesus’ sake. Consider just a few of his comments.¹⁸

[Romans 12:14] Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [1 Corinthians 4:12] and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure [2 Corinthians 12:10] Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. [2 Timothy 1:8] Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God [2 Timothy 3:12] Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

¹⁸ The Apostle Peter had this to say about persecution: ***[1 Peter 5:9] But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.***

Paul himself experienced a tremendous amount of persecution for his faithful proclamation of God’s truth.

[2 Corinthians 11:23] Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. [24] Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. [26] I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; [27] I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. [28] Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. [29] Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

If this life presents us with hardships, we shouldn’t be surprised. Everyone experiences rainy days.

And if following Jesus lands us in trouble, we shouldn’t be surprised, either. We’re fore-armed because we’ve been fore-warned.

The fact is that millions and millions of our fellow Christians, as we meet this morning, are experiencing the same things that Jeremiah did, the same things that the apostle Paul did, and the same things that Jesus told them would come. They are facing persecution.

2009 Realities

Today is the annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

And today there are over fifty countries where Christians are not free to worship the Lord, to serve Him, or to speak out for Him as we are free here.

The fact that they are not free to do so, however, does not keep many of them from worshiping, serving, or speaking out.

Instead, they join Jeremiah and countless others who have chosen to faithfully follow wherever God leads, believing that His pleasure is worth enduring people's displeasure and that loss in this world for His sake is worth it to gain in the next.

Conclusion:

There are two action points that come from this morning's message.

The first has to do with expressing our solidarity with brothers and sisters who are suffering. We are called to pray for and to support them.

Listen to what the author of the book of Hebrews tells us.

[Hebrews 13:3] Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

When Jeremiah was stuck in the mud at the bottom of the cistern, it was a courageous man named Ebed-melech (the name means "servant of the king) who came to his aid. He "remembered" Jeremiah.

We are called to remember those who are suffering for Jesus today and to become Ebed-melechs. We do so by praying for those in trouble as a result of their *no matter what* commitment to obey AND by our seeking ways to support them, materially, financially in their hour of need.

Will you pray for them? Will you look for ways to support your family at their time of need?¹⁹

The second action point has to do with what our life with Jesus will look like.

We Spurs fans have high expectations for the upcoming season. And high expectations are fine things - as long as they are realistic.

What are your expectations for living for Jesus?

Do your expectations include:

- an ever-increasing standard of living, perhaps as a reward for leading a decent life?
- a bevy of relationships that all "work" and are essentially conflict-free?
- a life rich with opportunities for leisure and the enjoyment of every creature comfort within grasp?
- safety?

Expectations may be couched as either high or low. They just need to be realistic. And a realistic expectation for what living as a Christian is all about will be involves a willingness to suffer.

God is interested in forming a company of loving warriors of whom He can say that He is not ashamed to be called their God (Hebrews 11:16)

He wants you and me to join that company.

¹⁹ I highly recommend an organization called, The Voice of the Martyrs. Go to www.persecution.com to find out about this wonderful ministry and how to partner with them.