

**Life's Ultimate Questions:
What Do I Do When Life Seems So Overwhelming?
Jeremiah 12:5**

Dr. Steve Horn

July 28, 2013

Text Introduction: We are in a series of messages that we are calling "Life's Ultimate Questions." Questions like: "What is the purpose of my life?" and "Is God watching over me?" Last time, we asked the question, "What is really important?" Our text for this series is the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet in the last days of Old Testament history before the exile. Today, we begin with just one verse.

Text: If you have raced with runners
and they have worn you out,
how can you compete with horses?
If you stumble in a peaceful land,
what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan?

Introduction: In February, 1986, still 15 years old, my life was forever changed by a man that God placed into my life. A few of you know him—his name is Jeff Fritscher. Jeff came to be my church's youth pastor. It wasn't long until Jeff said to me something to the effect that he believed that he had come to be youth pastor in order to take what he had learned in his life and pour it into other people's lives. He continued by indicating that if I was willing, he would pour into my life what he had learned as Jesus' disciple. He was the first person that I ever told that I believed God wanted me to be a preacher. The very first time I ever shared Christ with another person, I did so with him being by my side. The very first sermon that I ever preached, he sat with me and we wrote it together. Then, I preached it several times just to him before I ever preached it to a congregation.

In the early days of that relationship, he talked to me about the discipline of memorizing Scripture. He said we would start by memorizing two. One was Colossians 2:6, "As you therefore have received Jesus Christ as Lord, so walk in Him." The other Scripture he told me to memorize was this Scripture before us today, Jeremiah 12:5. The way I memorized it was "If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with the horses. If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?"

It seemed like an odd verse to memorize. I had no intention of getting in a race with a horse. I had heard about the Jordan River from Bible stories, but it hardly seemed relevant to whatever was going on in my life at Lafayette High.

And so, we talked about the meaning of the verse and why we were memorizing it. Jeff explained that the stuff I was going through as a 15 year old kid was nothing as compared to what was going to come. Whatever temptations I felt as a high school student while living under my parent's roof was nothing to the kind of temptation I was about to be exposed to if and when I went away for college. If I didn't learn now to trust God's Word and to trust God's will and to trust Him, then it would be more difficult later.

Someone has remarked about this verse that it's as if God is consoling Jeremiah in a rather odd sort of way with something like this, "Cheer up, Jeremiah, it's about to get worse!" I hardly think that's the

meaning of this verse. Rather, God is saying to Jeremiah, and to us, “Learn to trust me now so that you will trust me later.”

And yet, we struggle. We get overwhelmed. So, here is an ultimate question of life: “What do I do when life seems so overwhelming?”

- **Resist the urge to linger at the Pool of Pity.**

Let’s review just a moment the background to Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry and what God had called him to do. Often times, Jeremiah is referred to as the weeping prophet. This name comes as the result of the heart of his message. He lived and therefore prophesied at a time when Israel’s rebellion had reached its peak. In fact, because of their rebellion, exile was now a foregone conclusion. Jeremiah’s career as the spokesman of God was a difficult one. His message fell on unrepentant listeners. Not only that, but in chapter 11, we now learn that the people want to take Jeremiah’s life for the message he is preaching. And, as you can imagine, Jeremiah is overwhelmed. And, we see that for a moment, Jeremiah lingers at the pool of pity.

Jeremiah got stuck in the whys and how longs?

Look at Jeremiah 12:1-4.

You will be righteous, LORD,
even if I bring a case against You.
Yet, I wish to contend with You:
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the treacherous live at ease?
² You planted them, and they have taken root.
They have grown and produced fruit.
You are ever on their lips,
but far from their conscience.
³ As for You, LORD, You know me; You see me.
You test whether my heart is with You.
Drag the wicked away like sheep to slaughter
and set them apart for the day of killing.
⁴ How long will the land mourn
and the grass of every field wither?
Because of the evil of its residents,
animals and birds have been swept away,
for the people have said,
“He cannot see what our end will be.”

Jeremiah asks our questions, doesn’t he? Why Lord? How long, Lord? If you get stuck in the “whys” and “how longs” you are going to be stuck a long time.

- **Remind yourself often of the Marathon Principle.**

Life is a marathon and not a sprint.

God had called Jeremiah to a long ministry. And, because of that, endurance was going to be necessary. The work that God calls us to is an enduring work. The Bible is filled with instruction about endurance. Here are just two.

James 1:2-4 Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, ² keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lose heart.

Some days, you are going to be running pretty easy. Praise God for those days. Other days are going to be sprints. Praise God for those days. Some days are easy. Praise God for those days. Others are difficult. Praise God for those days. Every day is building in you endurance, and that endurance is bringing you into the more perfect will of God.

- **Realize that God is Preparing you for your future.**

Again, we see here that God does with Jeremiah what He does with us. He is preparing us. He is building in us faith and experience. There is a method to the madness. It's God's strategy to prepare us for the future.

What if the struggle of today is going to be what gives you strength for the future?

- **Rest in the Promises of God.**

There are many, but let's start with these...

1. The promise of His presence. (Jeremiah 1:7-8, 12, 19)
2. The promise of His plans. (Jeremiah 29:11)
3. The promise of prayer. (Jeremiah 29:12-13, 33:3)
4. The promise of His power. (Jeremiah 32:27)

Conclusion: This is a matter of trust—trusting Him every day!

Lamentations 3:22-24—His mercy is new every day.