



Over the past few weeks we've seen that Jonah is not in a good place despite his mission having been successful. Even with widespread repentance and submission to God in Nineveh, Jonah holds on to his resentment. One of the ironies of the story is that his bitterness actually makes life more difficult for him than for the people he hates. The more he stewes in his anger the more it affects his view of life. His choices effectively lead him to a state of depression in which he prefers death over life.

Jeremiah, some years later, experiences something similar in the course of ministry. In Jeremiah 12, the prophet complains to God about the apparent lack of justice in the world. In 12:1 he asks "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" Essentially why does the Lord let wicked people get away with the horrible things they do. Jeremiah is in a bad place and wants to give up. His complaint is the same as Jonah's with one huge exception, the Ninevites are repentant and the Israelites are not. They say the right things about God, but God is "far from their hearts" and they continue to sin while believing that God "will not see what happens" (2-4).

This major exception also points to a very different state of heart between Jonah and Jeremiah. Jonah is concerned about venting his bitterness while Jeremiah longs for justice and peace. Even as Jeremiah asks God to butcher the wicked in Judah, he asks God to look closely at his heart and test his thoughts (12:3). He also desires the best for his country (12:4).

Jeremiah's desire for righteousness leads to a much better answer from God than what Jonah receives. God's response to Jonah is a remedial lesson in compassion and God's purposes of redemption. What Jeremiah receives is a full response that recognizes his maturity and includes him in the solution. First, in verses 5-6 God warns Jeremiah about the costs and the dangers of serving him. Second, he tells him that the justice he seeks will come in just a matter of time (7-13). God will forsake Judah and "the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares" (11). Justice will be served. But third, and most importantly, God tells Jeremiah how he will restore those who worship him and "swear by his name" (16).

Jonah and Jeremiah's choices and perspectives result in very different outcomes for the two prophets. Where Jonah wallows in self-pity and depression despite God's correction, Jeremiah responds in faith and loyalty to the Lord despite incredible suffering. Where Jonah only wants to die, Jeremiah laments his circumstances but repeatedly returns to the Lord for encouragement and strength (Jer. 15; 20). He has plenty of reason to despair, but he knows on whom he can rely and finds life and hope in the midst of sin and destruction.

Discussion Questions

When you are depressed, angry, or hopeless, do you tend to lash out like Jonah or ask God to "test your thoughts" like Jeremiah?

How does our willingness or unwillingness to examine ourselves change our views of others, God, and ourselves? What practical differences result from honest or less than honest assessments of ourselves and others?

Both Jonah and Jeremiah said plenty to God. How does submission and repentance before God contribute to good mental health, and what can we do to develop a consistently submissive posture before God?