



Not forsaken
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we are concluding our series called **Running with the Horses**. God used the title of this series when speaking to the Prophet Jeremiah and He is saying this to us today. If we are worn out in the footrace we are running in this evil world, what makes us think we can be successful in a spiritual race against our enemy without total faith in God's promises? God's plan for us is that we would run with the horses and rise above the fray as we run the race He has for us.

SCRIPTURE¹

2 Chronicles 36:11-13 Zedekiah was *twenty-one* years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem *eleven years*. He did *evil* in the eyes of the Lord his God and *did not humble himself* before *Jeremiah* the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord. He also rebelled against *King Nebuchadnezzar*, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Jeremiah 38:2a This is what the Lord says: "Whoever stays in this city will die by the *sword, famine or plague*, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live.

Jeremiah 38:4-6 Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be *put to death*. He is *discouraging* the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them." "He is in your hands," King Zedekiah answered. So they took Jeremiah and put him into the *cistern* of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had *no water* in it, *only mud*, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

Jeremiah 52: 4-7a, 8-11 So in the *ninth* year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. They *encamped* outside the city and *built siege works* all around it. The city was kept under siege until the *eleventh year* of King Zedekiah. By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become *so severe* that there was no food for the people to eat. Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled. but the Babylonian army pursued King Zedekiah and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him. There at Riblah the king of Babylon killed the *sons of Zedekiah* before his eyes; he also killed all the officials of Judah. Then he put out Zedekiah's *eyes*, bound him with bronze shackles and *took him to Babylon*, where he put him in prison till the day of his death.

Hebrews 12:5b-6 "My son, do not make light of the *Lord's discipline*, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the *one he loves*, and he chastens everyone he *accepts* as his son."

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture referenced here is NIV

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV) The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

OBSERVATION

In about 930 BC, the nation of Israel split into two Kingdoms: The Northern Kingdom was named Israel and the Southern Kingdom became Judah. All of Israel's kings were evil; Judah had a few good ones. Whenever a king was disobedient to God's laws, He would send a prophet with a message to return to Him. If they would obey, God would relent and show mercy, but if they disobeyed, God would judge the nation. This cycle continued for 300 or so years. Israel received judgment first in 723 BC when Assyria overthrew it and took the people into exile. The remnant they left behind married Assyrians and their children were called Samaritans. About 140 years later the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and took their people into captivity.

QUESTION: When has your life been in a similar cycle: following God obediently and then going your own way?

QUESTION: When you do veer off of God's course, what typically causes you to do so?

Whenever the Israelites abandoned God's laws, several things happened: **1) God would be replaced.** The people worshiped alien gods that didn't place restrictions on them – they could live however they pleased. And **2) Sensuality would reign.** Since their new gods had no restrictions, the people could live out their sensuality in any way they wanted. Women and children paid the price for that and so, **3) The powerless would be marginalized.** The poor were charged exorbitant interest on loans and would be mistreated. God's law always emphasizes that it matters how we treat other people, but this belief was discarded from sinful societies.

QUESTION: Jedidiah tried to push Jeremiah and God out of his life because he didn't agree with them. When have you done that to a friend who was trying to give you Godly advice?

God sent Jeremiah to warn the King, to tell him to return to God with purity, restore the Temple and destroy idols. We are also called to repent and be restored to the Father who loves us with endless love.

QUESTION: How does the Old Testament help you understand relationships with God and each other today?

APPLICATION

So, it looks like God disciplines His people, because He will do whatever it takes to get us back. He does that because He loves us. In about 535 BC, He began gathering the Israelites back to their homeland. Out of that remnant Jesus would eventually be born, fulfilling His ultimate promise to redeem and restore.

QUESTION: How does it make you feel that God planned centuries ahead to provide for your Savior?

QUESTION: Have you read Psalm 139? What does it say to you now?

Remember the Prodigal Son? His father let him go knowing it would take brokenness to bring him back home. We are often disciplined because of our pride and associated stubbornness. "Unhumble" people make "unhumble" decisions just as people who are full-of-themselves make full-of-themselves poor decisions. That was Zedekiah. Guess who didn't! Jeremiah!! Some of us may be in a season of discipline right now – we have rebelled and rejected, gone our own way and we are in a season of God's discipline. This doesn't mean that struggles like finances, health or betrayals are God's discipline in our lives, but they might be. Our loving Father disciplines those He loves, but he hates our pride and sin. They create worship for idols.

QUESTION: What do you think God is doing to you that represents discipline?

QUESTION: When have you seen God discipline a family member?

God restored us. His love is steadfast and based upon His covenant with us. He sent Jesus to the Cross to die for us – His love will never end – it is new every morning. If anyone feels separated from God, we are wanted back. It takes humility to admit we've been wrong, but that moment of surrender is part of the deal. Just say we are tired of fighting with Him, turn 180 degrees and go home again.

QUESTION: When your life has been in a downward cycle, how were you brought back to God?

QUESTION: When you realize that Christian friends are struggling in a downward cycle, what can you do to help them return to God?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, it seems that we need to start thinking in terms of our race with the horses. Our world and its troubles, fears, and need of courageous Christians to take up Your banner is evident in our time. Help us to get out of our destructive cycles and commit completely to be obedient to You regardless of the persecution facing us. Let us be faithful and trustworthy as we hold up Your name in all the earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

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