

He's Your Pick-Me-Up!

A sermon based on Jeremiah 38:1-13.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

I hate to bring this up, but have any of you checked the forecast lately? I try not to, just because I know how often and easily weather up here can change. But, at least a couple of times this past week, I snuck a peak (so I could tell my grandma what to pack for her trip up here), and yep, I saw it...the little white snowflake symbol on my weather app.

We all know it's coming. The dreary rain we've been having inevitably turns to beautiful snowfalls which tend to overstay their welcome. But at least now, most of us are hoping that holds off as long as it can, dreading the long, cold, dark winter months on the horizon.

School started only a few weeks ago...how many of you feel like you're already dragging? Work...it's work. You don't get any summer breaks. Are there days when it feels like you need more than a few cups of coffee to get you up and going and motivated? Are you dealing with a bit of the gunk that seems to always be making its rounds, and you want nothing more than to crawl into bed and sleep the day away? Are you sick or tired of what's going on in our country today, all of the false or vindictive narratives being spun?

Could you use a pick-me-up?

What helps to soften the blow? Maybe it's the brief time before the snow flies (or at least before it sticks around) where we get a few more days of warm weather – an Indian summer. Maybe you have Homecoming or your next three day weekend circled in red on your calendar. Maybe it's that warm cup of tea and the comfortable spot on the couch with one of those sappy Hallmark movies waiting in your Netflix queue that always manages to lift your spirits when you're feeling under the weather.

Every once in a while, it's nice to have a little pick-me-up...something you have or do or have done to you when you're feeling tired or sad or lonely...to make you feel better.

You think Jeremiah could have used a pick-me-up? I mean, let's look past, for a moment, the fact he was sitting in a cistern, left to slowly die from starvation.

How much more do you know about Jeremiah? Besides the book of Jeremiah, he wrote another book...anyone know what it was? Lamentations...filled with his laments. Jeremiah's nickname? He's been called the "Weeping Prophet," a fitting name. Do you know why?

Look at the context of our verses this morning. To briefly summarize, a couple of chapters prior, God had Jeremiah write his words on a scroll, saying, ***"Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them (the Babylonians coming and invading their land), each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin."*** Well, the king listened to those words, ordered the scroll burned, and Jeremiah had to go into hiding.

The next chapter, Jeremiah tried to go home, but he was captured and thrown into prison because he wasn't proclaiming a favorable message from the LORD.

And now we have our verses today, with Jeremiah, again, being thrown into a cistern and left to die. He certainly had a tough life. Even harder, though, was the message God gave him to share. You heard it today, ***“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. They will escape with their lives; they will live.’³ And this is what the Lord says: ‘This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’”*** Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet, he was there, in Jerusalem, when the Babylonians finally did come and destroy the city. He was there when they demolished the temple – God’s house. He was there, urging the people to repent of their wickedness but then watching them cast his message aside.

But now, accused of treason (because the Israelite officials didn’t like his message), and the King too afraid to do anything about it, he was stuck in a cistern – a pit, left to die a slow and agonizing death. He needed a pick-me-up.

Do you, too? Can we talk about what’s going on in your life? Pressures of work, school, being a stay-at-home parent? Relationships that are ok...you wouldn’t call them disastrous, but you’re still bummed because you know there’s always work that can be done to improve things, whether it’s a spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, child, sibling, parent, best friend. Financial burdens, where it feels like an unexpected expense could come up and severely cripple you. Health issues – serious or not – having you feeling a little more than concerned and worried. Is it loneliness, depression, anger, guilt, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed?

What miserable pit are you stuck in? We all have at least one.

Could I add one more? What was Jeremiah’s challenge here? Faithfully proclaiming God’s Word, and what happened? He was hated because of it. His enemies tried to kill him.

We spent the entire summer learning how God wants you stand out from the rest of our culture...to live Christ Culture...to live as a light for Christ and as God’s dearly loved child, which, again, often differs from our world today. And part of that means doing exactly what Jeremiah did...yes, being eager to be God’s messenger and share the good news of God’s love with people, but also being willing to share the not-so-good news...not that the Babylonians are coming to destroy, but that the end – either of the world or of life – is coming and what that means for those who do not believe in Jesus.

When you examine what was going on back then and our world today, not much has changed, has it? Warn the nation about the sword of God’s justice hanging over a people that defends the murder of children, every form of perversion, and insists God’s truth is relative/subjective and not absolute. And don’t expect a medal! Expect what God promised (which we heard about in our gospel)...and that’s the cross. In other words, we may not be accused of treason today, but we do face being ostracized for speaking of and living according to the truth of God’s Word.

Is that a pit you’re willing to go in? Because, friends, standing firm in your faith in Jesus means you won’t always be loved by everyone. It sometimes means you don’t always get what you want. Like, you think about the people you hang out with or date a little more...and try to surround yourself with those who hold the same morals as you. You’re more aware of and on guard against what you’re exposing yourself to, being mindful of how God is the ultimate authority in your life, not society, not even your

own wants or desires. You look for and grab hold of opportunities to stand up for Jesus, even if it means crude remarks, lost friendships, a litany of other hardships that result from being a child of God.

Are you willing to carry that cross...go down that pit? Or are you avoiding it?

We've all been there. And what keeps us stuck and sinking is the knowledge...the truth we should be doing this (God commands it) and we often aren't.

We need a pick-me-up, like Jeremiah did. He got one. You remember how the account played out? A man by the name of Ebed-Melech, a Cushite (so a foreigner), who served in some capacity in the king's palace, went to bat for Jeremiah. He observed the wickedness of the men who simply out to get Jeremiah, he cared enough about the well-being and livelihood of Jeremiah, so he went to plead Jeremiah's case before the king. And then, armed with the king's permission and 30 of his finest soldiers, he went and literally lifted Jeremiah out of the cistern.

Do you know what his name means, Ebed-Melech? "Servant of the king." Think about that for a moment. "Servant of the king" gave Jeremiah his pick-me-up.

A different Ebed-Melech, "servant of the king" has done the same for you and me. You know who?

Of course, Jesus, who **"did not come to be served, but to serve,"** who **"came to seek and to save what was lost."** You know, Jesus, he didn't just reach down a rope to us when we were stuck in the pit of our sins. He got down there with us. Listen to the words of our gospel, **"[Jesus] then began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."**

In his love, God sent Jesus from the perfection of heaven to this world, a cesspool of sin. In doing so, he literally lowered Jesus to be one of us, a human being who knew and felt and experienced all we go through as believers in Christ, but on a much grander scale. Jesus, being perfect and sinless, proclaiming himself to be the Son of God, faced vile hatred from his enemies, the likes of which none of us have had to deal with and probably never will.

And that was all knowing where that road led...straight to the cross, more painful than any cross God cares for us to carry in our lives...because not only did he carry it. He died on it. Jesus died on the cross, being loaded with your sins...and your sins...and your sins...and my sins...and every single person's sins. Jesus died on the cross, being loaded with all our sins and suffering our eternal punishment, the pit of hell.

But he also saw the end result of that cross...forgiveness for you and me, his perfection made ours...and also life. Jesus, through his resurrection, picked us up out of the depths of our sins and the depths of hell so that one day, we will see the light of life with him in the glories of heaven forever.

You know, how disgraceful that for the sake of God's love and faithfulness, his faithful and loving servants receive abuse and persecution! But what grace, that the perfect and faithful and loving Servant of the King – Jesus – received abuse and persecution and cross and death for us! Because of him, we have been brought from death to life. How's that for an eternal pick-me-up?

But what about now? Yes, I know that Jesus and his forgiveness lifts me up out of the pit of sin. But what about living for Jesus now? What about standing up for my loving God and carrying that cross he

promises we'll have in this life? What about all the hardships scattered along that path? Is there a pick-me-up for that?

Well, you want to know what God promised through Jeremiah earlier? You likely know it... ***"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*** You want to know what lifts you up, gives you comforts, gives you courage to stand up for Jesus? Promises and assurances, like these, from God's Word. They're plentiful, encouraging, and always there for you...reminding you of what's at the end of life for those who carry their crosses out of love for and faith in Jesus...the hope and future of eternal glory.

And now look around. How comforting is it to see and be around fellow cross-bearers? Those who are willing to make a meal when you're down with a sickness or injury. Those who tell you "I'm praying for you" when you're facing a struggle in your life. Those who are willing to lend an ear when you need to talk and give you godly encouragement for the tough times. Those who are simply here, who you know believe the same as you and so are in the same boat as you. We can be the pick-me-ups to each other because we're on the same journey together!

And being picked up, what do we do? I know it's been a source of some controversy these past couple of weeks, but have you seen or heard of Nike's latest campaign? Their current spokesman is Colin Kaepernick, former NFL quarterback turned outspoken advocate for racial equality, an end to police brutality. Now, we're not here for a conversation about him, but do you know main statement he's making for Nike? It's "Believe in something, even if it means giving up everything."

If that were spiritual encouragement, he'd be spot on for us today. In Luke 9, Jesus says, ***"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?"***

The call to radical sacrifice for the sake of a transcendent goal is moving. When we apply it to carrying our crosses for Jesus, it's the most important thing ever. Our discipleship means you *believe in the Jesus thing. Even if it means sacrificing everything.* Kudos to Nike and Kaepernick for helping us with the vocabulary.

That's our goal. The road is not easy. The cross is heavy. The pits can feel so deep. But thank Jesus for the pick-me-up. And now we gladly go. Amen.