

Fire in My Bones

Jeremiah 20

WHAT WE FOUND

Pashhur, a priest and the chief officer of the Temple, had Jeremiah beaten and locked in the stocks (20:1-2): the first assault the book narrates, and it came from religious authority. Out of that night came the rawest prayer in the prophets: “O LORD, thou hast deceived me” (20:7). Jeremiah accuses God to His face, and the Holy Spirit kept every syllable in the Bible. That is the lesson we cannot unlearn: accusation brought to God can be real prayer, because it keeps the sufferer inside the relationship, facing Him. Jeremiah stays in the conversation.

Then the hinge. He tries to resign, and cannot: “there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (20:9). Real vocation is not the absence of the desire to quit; it is the presence of something stronger. Paul knew the same fire: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

And we found lament on the lips of Jesus Himself: sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:38-39), praying a psalm of lament from the cross (Mark 15:34), offering “loud cries and tears” (Hebrews 5:7). A third of the Psalter laments. Praise and lament are the two lungs of honest prayer, and chapter 20 breathes with both, verse 13 singing and verse 14 in the dark, with no apology in between. Some prayers do not resolve by bedtime, and they are still prayers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Athanasius · *Letter to Marcellinus on the Psalms*

St. Athanasius wrote that whoever sings the Psalms finds them a mirror, seeing in them the movements of his own soul, and receives words for wounds he could not name. The lament tradition exists so that no human anguish is ever left without a prayer to carry it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John of the Cross · *The Dark Night*

St. John of the Cross taught that God may permit the felt consolations of prayer to be withdrawn as a purification, drawing a soul toward deeper union with Him. The darkness that seems like God’s absence can be the shadow cast by His approach.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa of Calcutta · *Come Be My Light (her published letters)*

The world discovered after her death that St. Teresa of Calcutta endured decades of interior darkness while serving with radiant joy. Fidelity in the dark is not hypocrisy. It is heroism.

Live It This Week

- Once this week, pray the prayer you have been avoiding, out loud, alone, unedited. Start with “Lord, here is what I actually feel,” and do not clean it up. End with one line of praise if you can; if you cannot, trust Him with the rest.
- Pray Psalm 13 slowly one evening this week. Notice the turn at verse 5, and notice that the psalm gives full voice to lament in verses 1-4 before it turns toward trust.
- Check on one person you suspect is in a dark night. Do not fix them. Sit with them honestly, without a forced happy ending.

Memory Verse

"But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, they will not overcome me." (Jeremiah 20:11, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Jeremiah 23. Pay attention to shepherds, and to a name given near the beginning of the chapter.

Catechism References

CCC 2725 · CCC 2605-2606