



Croatian
Evangelistic
Outreach

Kneza Branimira 11
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
ceo@cce.hr

T+385 1 4920 726
F +385 1 4813 871
www.cce.hr



WHEN THE LORD PERSUADES US

Mario Dučić,
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LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded;
You are stronger than I, and have prevailed.
(Jeremiah 20:7)

There are discouraged believers who have turned away from the Lord because of various pressures in life or anxiety in the soul that they could no longer deal with. When I say “turned away” or “discouraged” I don’t necessarily mean all who leave the church and go back in the world. I especially want to address the believers who come to church and who have begun to turn away from active discipleship with Jesus because they feel they can no longer take the pressure. Although they may come to church their salvation and surrender to the Lord is doubtful, as is the fruit they ought to bear for

God’s kingdom – those things that God expects of every one of His disciples.

As the time of Christ’s second return draws closer we need to fight all the more to keep our faith and confidence in the Lord. Believers who misunderstand truth and the way God works are being beaten down all the more. The battle proceeds in the minds of many whom the enemy tries to mislead into withdrawing from the race they are running, to keep them from running to the end, and receiving the incorruptible crown of glory – eternal life.

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► **1. WHEN THE LORD PERSUADES US, WE ARE OFTEN RIDICULED FOR PROCLAIMING THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL.**

"O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me." (Jeremiah 20:7)

All who come to Christ are persuaded in a good way. God was stronger than us and, along with the Holy Spirit, convicted us of sin and carried us away with His love and the truth of the gospel so that we would become His disciples. Of course, He didn't do this out of selfishness but rather so we would glorify His name and spread the message of salvation

However, many believers grow weary because they fail to understand that pressure and trouble is simply a part of the Christian life. Paul said that it is impossible to circumvent them: "...no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know." (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4)

Christians become confused when they hear wrong doctrine telling them that believers do

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not have to suffer rather they must always be enthusiastic victors. For many, a life with Christ means a life of blessing, health and joy while they consider trouble, rejection and suffering to be connected with the powers of darkness. However, to be honest, I have never seen that these kinds of Christians have a life of true surrender and discipleship.

To be sure, if we passionately begin to live and share the good news of salvation we will often be rejected and misunderstood. These kinds of troubles are part of the normal Christian life. After a while, due to constant trouble and difficult life situations, many grow weary and pull away from Jesus or often question whether their approach was correct in regards to the reaction it brought about.

The Apostle Paul, who for many is an example of surrender, said that he was often found in trouble: "...in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of *my own* countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—" (1 Corinthians 11:26-27) In fact, he encouraged young Timothy to persevere in godliness regardless of pressure because: "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

We don't like this part so much, which is why many churches and believers compromise in order to be liked by the world; to be respected and avoid the troubles that come with true discipleship. It is not strange that our churches

are not effective; it is not strange that many believers turn away from Christ. We must begin to draw people in not by our outward appearance but by God's Word. This way people will realize for themselves that Christianity is more than interesting seminars, nice songs, and good fellowship.

Jeremiah, the one who the Lord persuaded, after obeying God, prophesied the truth about the fall of Israel. The priest Pashhur didn't applaud and thank him, instead Jeremiah got a beating and ended up in prison. "Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who *was* also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that *were* in the high gate of Benjamin, which *was* by the house of the LORD." (Jeremiah 20:1-2)

When the Lord persuades us, while we may proclaim the truth, because of Him and His word we might be rejected; but let's not ask ourselves, after a time, why people either avoid us or mock us and discourage us, rather let us accept the fact that trouble is a part of the normal Christian life.

During my years as a pastor I have witnessed many difficulties in Christian homes. Some Christians have lost their jobs because they took a stand for righteousness. While on the other hand some believers threw out the truth, changed churches, and disdained those who stood for righteousness. If you are discouraged, I would like to say to you that this is all a part of the gospel and the process of entering God's kingdom. Persecution and trouble for the cause of Christ is a normal part of being a surrendered believer who desires to be led by Christ and speak the truth. Jesus Christ

said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10)

It is not easy to go through trials. When we stand for truth we may feel lonely, rejected, literally run down, or emotionally and physically exhausted; the enemy may tell us that God has left us or that He wouldn't have thus persuaded us had we not been devoted to the truth. We may feel like David did who because of scorn, rejection, and inhumane treatment felt like a worm; the sting of rejection almost did him in, yet the Lord was his Helper. "But *I am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people

All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*,
"He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" (Psalm 22:7-9)

Jeremiah didn't take trouble lightly either; he said that whenever he spoke the listeners ridiculed and scorned him. "For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, "Violence and plunder!" Because the word of the LORD was made to me a reproach and a derision daily." (Jeremiah 20:8)

Thus when the Lord persuades us, we must accept the fact that we will go through trials and that it is a normal thing for people to mock and ridicule us for the sake of God's Word which we are proclaiming.

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► **2. WHEN THE LORD PERSUADES US WE WILL OFTEN WANT TO FLEE HIM BECAUSE OF THE PRESSURE THAT COMES WITH DISCIPLESHIP**

"I have become the ridicule of all my people--their taunting song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood. He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes. You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity. I said, "My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD." (Lamentations 3:14-18)

These moments can also be a part of discipleship and maturing in the Lord. The first reaction of many pastors is to ease the mind of those facing trials or to even to cast out evil spirits. However, they would be more effective by telling them that this is simply a God doing His work in their life.

Some of the experiences of Jeremiah have become, for me, a normal part of discipleship. I have accepted it as normal to be found in moments of desperation, trouble, and trials because this is a good place to reconsider and ask ourselves if our life is really founded on God's righteousness and if we are truly in His will. Therein lies the rub for many believers; actually in these difficult circumstances many walk

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away from the Lord because they simply do not understand the truth about God and His way of working. Sometimes troubles can be so emotional that believers have been known to do themselves physical harm due to feelings of incapability and hopelessness. The enemy knows how to mentally so exhaust us that we surrender to pressure as one way of running from the Lord.

Here is the main problem; when God begins to work in us it is possible to feel bitter and scorned, it is possible to be rejected by other believers because of the truth; but when this takes place we need seek God for discernment to know if the trouble we are facing is from the enemy.

If believers cannot bear the pressure any longer and if it is not the work of the devil, they need to question their ways and change that which does not align with the Word of God. This is where we see many believers give in to pressure who do not wish to change or do that which the Lord has commanded them to do. This is where many with good intentions walk away from the Lord instead of breaking under His hand of discipleship; they run away from relationships, from the church, and in bitterness they flee from God's Word and prayer. Instead of blessing and maturity they are hurt due to the trials they face; they become stiff necked and hard hearted and in the end fail to bring forth the fruit God intended of them.

This condition can be emotionally difficult; I have personally experienced these difficulties a couple of times so much so that I literally screamed because I had to die to self. However, I want to emphasize and encourage you that it

is very important that in these situations that we take on the yoke of Christ because fleshly and self-willed Christians will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven, regardless of whether they attend church. Moreover, this is one of the key reasons why we have more psychologically and emotionally unstable Christians among us. Not only do they not mature spiritually, they refuse to break before the Lord while continuing to serve in their own strength and will, which leads them into error. This is why in the end they walk away, because under the influence of evil and deceiving spirits they give into sin or bring upon themselves physical harm.

Not one of Jeremiah's prophecies was easy. He also found himself in situations we can identify with; whether they are life pressures, church problems, disobedience or even sin. This condition inside of us is often very emotional and dramatic; we see a couple of examples of Jeremiah in his book Lamentations.

"All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction. My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people." (Lamentations 3:46-48)

"My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird. They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me. The waters flowed over my head; I said, 'I am cut off!'" (Lamentations 3:52-54)

"For I heard many mocking: 'Fear on every side!' 'Report,' they say, 'and we will report it!' All my acquaintances watched for my stumbling, saying, 'Perhaps he can be induced; then we will prevail against him, And we will take our revenge on him.'" (Jeremiah 20:10)

"I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.'" (Jeremiah 20:9)

Jeremiah thought this was the solution – to not think about God or speak His name: this is the easiest way for the flesh, but not for eternity. In these last days many believers ask themselves why we must proclaim the Word at all, why must they take a stand for Him and lose their jobs, friends, and family; they ask themselves why they must suffer ridicule, hurt, turmoil, emotional struggles, and find themselves in desperation. Wouldn't it be better to take a vacation, turn away from God, and never speak about Him again; to walk away from our Christian friends and from everything else in order to finally have some peace?

It may be momentarily better if we decide to give in to our emotions and flesh, but it is also true that it will lead us into error and in the end to failure because if we don't die to ourselves and serve the Lord in His power we will not be able to fulfill the plans He has for us; as a result we will miss His goals for our life. Let's not run away from the Lord in the day of trouble, rather let's draw near to Him and learn from Him all that is needed to give glory to His name.

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The way out of these troubles is to understand how to receive the burning truth.

► **3. IF THE LORD PERSUADES US, WE MUST REMIND OURSELVES THAT HE IS STRONGER THAN US AND OUR ENEMY.**

"Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But *His word* was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding *it* back, and I could not... But the LORD *is* with me as a mighty, awesome One. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper. *Their* everlasting confusion will never be forgotten." (Jeremiah 20:9, 11)

There are many times when I told myself that I could no longer take the emotional and mental strain – personal, family, and church troubles; and while I will not describe the situations I have been through the last ten years of serving Christ, there were times of desperation, disappointment, betrayal, enmity, and even vexation toward God; there has been turmoil and uncertainty. And while there have been short periods and long periods, in the end the burning truth of God's

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faithfulness and goodness upheld me.

What is important to remember is that when we find ourselves under the pressure of the enemy and facing difficulties, or when perhaps the Lord wants to teach us a lesson or change something in our life. It is important that we not grow weary but apply the truth of God's Word and direct our life accordingly to those truths and not by our emotions, on which we can not depend nor make proper decisions. No where in the Bible can we find where we are encouraged to react based upon our emotions.

Due to difficult trials many believers stop serving while placing their priorities in areas where they sense peace. Because of the pressure they feel they no longer wish to read the Bible or pray, they stop coming to church, they don't feel good enough to pray, worship, witness and their life is full of lament, passivity, manipulation, and running from the Lord where it ought to be a place of receiving the burning truth of God's goodness and faithfulness and in the end they are led into error and eventually to failure.

The first burning truth that kindled in Jeremiah is that the Lord is good and merciful. "*Through* the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." The Hebrew word for goodness is *chesed* meaning love or mercy and gives the meaning that we are not destroyed because of his sympathy for us will never cease. *They are* new every morning; great *is* Your faithfulness. 'The LORD *is* my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him!'" (Lamentations 3:22-24)

This is the truth we must understand and on which we must base our life regardless of

whether we are mocked or let down by others (be they believers or not) because of the Word of God; regardless of whether or not we are pressed down by the end of our soul – the devil – or because of our sin. What we must know and receive is that God is always willing to change every situation and forgive our sin if we cry out to Him for help because He has made a New Covenant with us!

In the Lord is renewal, forgiveness and healing; that is why Jeremiah has told us that His mercy and love is new every morning and faithful and great! It is greater than our momentary situations in the church, greater than this perverse people, greater than our trials and troubles, and greater than our sin that we think cannot be forgiven!

Though we may change from day to day our Lord never changes. In Malachi we read, “For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” (Malachi 3:6)

We must not project ourselves onto a picture of our God making Him into a basic sinful man who often changes, breaking His word and promises. Believers, churches, and workers change their theology and opinions every year; in their disobedience they misinterpret verses out of context to their own demise. But one thing forever is sure – God never changes!

Therefore, if His word says that He will renew us and that He is good then we must put aside our victim-like emotional rollercoaster and believe the burning truth – if we turn to God and cry out for help he will not leave us, for our life is in His hands. “The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, to the soul *who* seeks Him. *It is* good

that *one* should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.” (Lamentation 3:25-26)

The second burning truth is that in the days of trouble it is good to consider one’s life and not turn from him. “The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, to the soul *who* seeks Him. *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. *It is* good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, because *God* has laid *it* on him; let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him give *his* cheek to the one who strikes him, *and* be full of reproach. For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” (Lamentation 3: 25-33)

The worst thing we can do in times of trouble is make major life decisions, pull away from serving

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the Lord, and close ourselves off from people and difficult situations. If we do these things we will never learn the lessons God wants us to learn nor will we change. Because God is good we need to be patient, rely on Him, and wait for Him.

When life presses in on us let us not give Him a deadline to bring a solution, rather let us think on His discipline and how we may be able to understand and respond to that which God has for us. The solution often is not a change in surroundings or new company but rather that we repent of our sin, reign in our emotions, or perhaps stand firm on God's Word regardless of the consequences. The circumstances may last a short time or a long time, it depends of our attitude, but one thing is sure, the One who persuaded us is stronger than us and our enemy. Therefore, we call out to Him and cast our cares upon Him, because while he persuaded us He will not leave us alone. His goodness has not ceased nor has his mercy has not run dry. "But the LORD *is* with me as a mighty, awesome One. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper.

Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten. But, O LORD of hosts, You who test the righteous, *and* see the mind and heart, let me see Your vengeance on them; for I have pleaded my cause before You. Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers." (Jeremiah 20:11-13)

"I called on Your name, O LORD, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: 'Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help.'" (Lamentations 3:55-56)

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