

THE RACE

by Tricia Berg

[God's reply to Jeremiah's plea for the wicked people who are persecuting him to be judged.] *"If you have raced with runners and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in a peaceful land, what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan?" Jeremiah 12:5*

This verse has amazing relevance to our times, which is not surprising, since God's word is timeless just as He is. I think if we were to re-phrase Jeremiah 12:5 for today, it might look something like this:

My people who are called by My Name - if you are already weary from fighting in My army during easy times when the battle has just begun, if (unlike Jeremiah was) you are not strong enough to withstand the pressure from this fallen world to deny Me when the "punishment" is to be "unliked" in social media for having an unpopular but biblical opinion or stance, then how will you stand up for Me when there is a REAL consequence - whether catastrophic financial ruin, imprisonment, physical pain or even death? If you remain quiet while My Holy Name and My Truth are attacked by the "wisdom" of men even though you have freedom to defend them, how will you suddenly become courageous and speak up during a time when you are no longer permitted by law to do so?

This world we live in does not equate truth with love anymore. *Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with **lies so clever they sound like the truth.** 15 Instead, we will **speak the truth in love,** growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. Ephesians 4:14-15* They're in rebellion against God and prefer to embrace their own version of "truth". *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears **away from the truth** and turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4*

The moment a viewpoint is expressed by anyone that clashes with theirs, that is the end of their "tolerance" as well as your freedom of speech and religion in their selfish, unenlightened minds. ***The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only***

through the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth**, since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. Romans 1:18-19

They think that believers are ignorant and stupid, but God says otherwise. Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For **the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight**. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 He says that the beginning of wisdom begins with knowing Him. Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he **understands and knows Me**, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." Jeremiah 9:23-24

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "**I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.**" 20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For **the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom**, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But **God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise**; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 1 Corinthians 1:18-27

God desires a humble and penitent heart trusting only in Him. He detests pride. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Psalm 40:4 My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for **if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding**; if you seek her as silver

and search for her as for hidden treasures; then **you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.** Proverbs 2:1-5 Don't make the mistake of thinking that people who are considered wise by this world's standards know better than what you learned from the Word as a follower of Christ. *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God.* 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Do we want to be popular or do we want people to hear about and receive salvation? **If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed,** because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.* 1 Peter 4:14-16 God says that to be friends with the world is to be His enemy. *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.* James 4:4 He forewarns us to expect that the world will not accept us or our message. *"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you."* John 15:18-19 *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.* John 17:14

Shall we obey the world when they tell us that our message is not welcome and to keep it to ourselves? What did Jeremiah choose to do? He willingly suffered persecution for the Lord. Peter and the other apostles refused to remain silent even after being jailed for it. *"We gave you clear orders not to teach in Jesus' name," he said. "But you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching..."* Peter and the other apostles replied, **"We must obey God instead of men!"** Acts 5:28-29

This life is not about us. We are here to glorify God by serving Him faithfully the entire time we have. This life is short. Do we keep in mind that the gospel is about eternity?! *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.* John 3:36 The world wants "freedom" from God, not realizing that He is the only Way to have true, everlasting freedom:

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But

what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? **For the end of those things is death.** But now that you have been **set free from sin** and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and **its end, eternal life.** Romans 6:20-22

There can be no higher goal than making sure that we all know God and what He wants—how to please Him—because He is the only One worthy of being our top priority. The earth and everything in it, including everyone, belongs to Him. He made it. He maintains it. He has a good, perfect plan for it. He will not fail. He never has. His success does not depend upon us in any way. He gave us free will to decide whether we will choose to please Him or ourselves. It is our privilege and honor to lay down the free will He gifted us with and take up His instead, serving Him alone with everything we have to offer. Only by doing so can we bring Him honor and glory, for which He will reward us.

No man ever won a race on foot against a horse at all, let alone during troubled times and over rough terrain. What is God talking about in that verse at the top? I believe it's this: Just as with everything, God is not deterred at all by the opposition to His will. Nothing ever takes Him by surprise. He wants those of us who are His to be prepared to stand firm, relying on His strength in this race. *His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of the warrior; **the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.*** Psalm 147:10-11

It's a fight against evil that we are unable to see. The Holy Spirit is not visible to our eye, but we can see the beautiful fruits of His life-giving work in and through us. *"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* John 3:8 The power of the evil "ruler of this world" is also invisible to us, but we can see the effects of it. God tells us the only way to walk in the victory He has already won:

*Finally, **be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.** 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.** 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand firm.** 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the*

shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:10-20

We can usually tell a lot about what is in a person's heart, and therefore who they belong to, by their actions and attitudes. *By this **the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious:** anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. 1 John 3:10 The children of God are told not to behave the same as worldly people do: With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against Him. 19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ. 21 Since **you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from Him,** 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. 25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors **the truth,** for we are all parts of the same body. Ephesians 4:17-25*

Satan always tries to impersonate God, but he has no good in him whatsoever, so his fruits are rotten to the core. *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of My own accord, but He sent me. 43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear My word. 44 You are of **your father the devil,** and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and **does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.** When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for **he is a liar and the father of lies.** 45 But because **I tell the truth,** you do not believe me. 46 Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is of God hears the words of God. **The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.**" John 8:42-47*

Satan's goal is to destroy us in order to hurt God, because we were made in God's image. (Genesis 1, 2) He does it by encouraging us to doubt what God

really said and by tempting us to sin (Genesis 3), by twisting scriptures and even calling into question God's existence. Satan knows he can't win against God, but he knows how much God loves us—so he tries to bring us low so that we'll dishonor God, our loving Maker and Redeemer. Satan lost the war almost 2,000 years ago. *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15*
Yet, he persists in fighting these battles in order to do as much damage as possible before his time is up.

*"How you are fallen from heaven,
O shining star, son of the morning!
You have been thrown down to the earth,
you who destroyed the nations of the world.
For you said to yourself,
'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars.
I will preside on the mountain of the gods
far away in the north.
I will climb to the highest heavens
and be like the Most High.'
Instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead,
down to its lowest depths.
Everyone there will stare at you and ask,
'Can this be the one who shook the earth
and made the kingdoms of the world tremble?
Is this the one who destroyed the world
and made it into a wasteland?
Is this the king who demolished the world's greatest cities
and had no mercy on his prisoners?'"*
Isaiah 14:12-17

The very thought of evil, invisible forces sounds pretty scary, but remember this battle is not to be won by our efforts and strength, but by the Lord's almighty power. *My victory and honor come **from God alone**. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. Psalm 62:7*

*Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For **the battle is the Lord's**, and he will give you into our hand."*
1 Samuel 17:45-47

*When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "**Do not be afraid**, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:15-17*

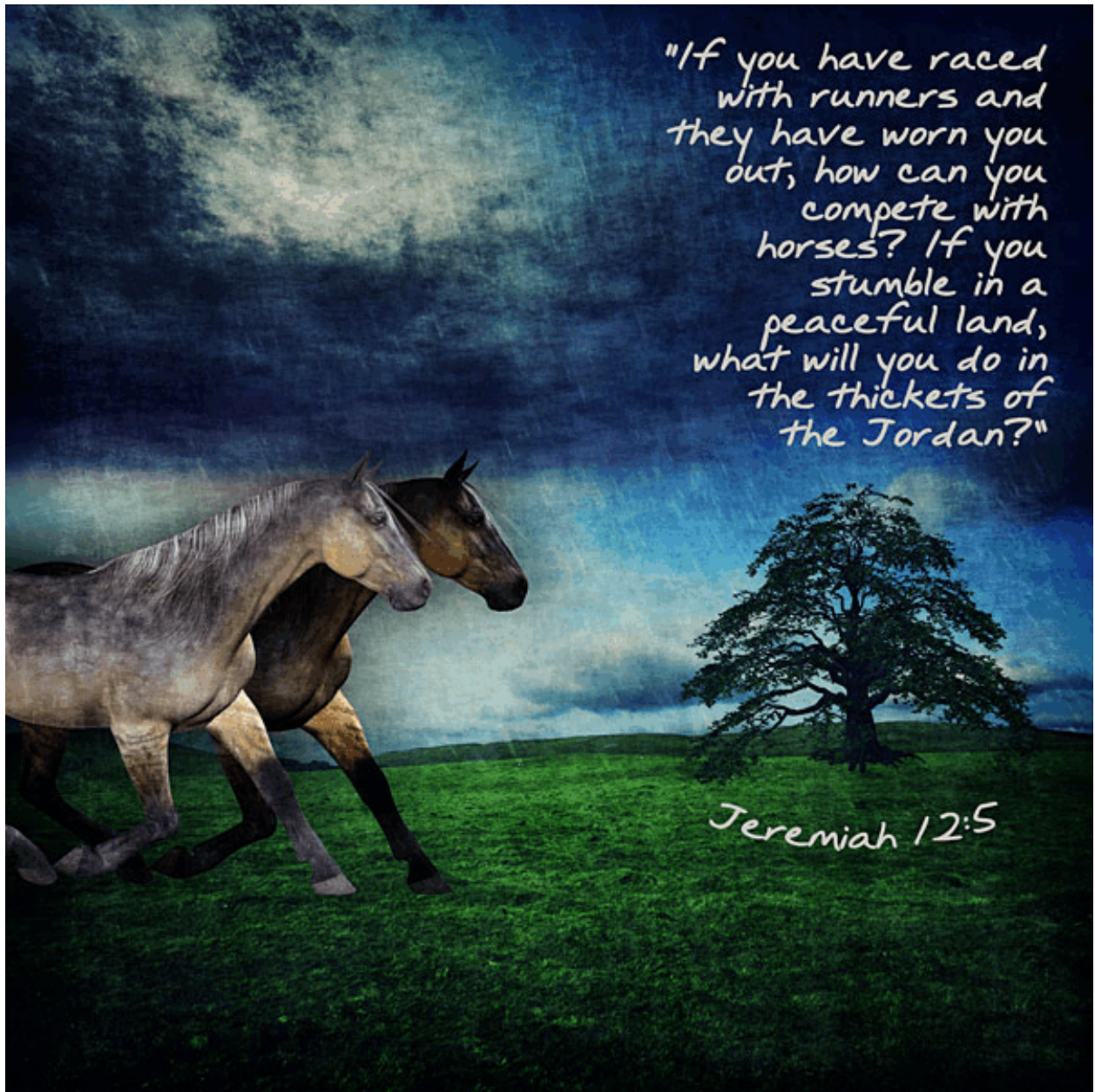
*And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: This is what the LORD says: 'Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for **the battle is not yours, but God's**. You will not need to fight in this battle. **Stand firm, hold your position**, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' **Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed.**" 2 Chronicles 20:15, 17*

We are meant to love our neighbors as ourselves, but be careful who you link arms with in this race. Are they going to lift you up closer to God, or are they going to bring you down, drawing you away from God and His perfect will? *A scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge is easy to one who has understanding. **Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge.** Proverbs 14:6-7 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or **what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?** 2 Corinthians 6:14-15*

God has equipped us with all of the tools we need to win this race. All we have to do is remember to make use of them. *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2*

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The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. Exodus 15:3

"How goes the battle?" O, watchman, tell! Look from yon heights, where the pilgrims dwell! Are they walking humbly where Jesus trod, And faithfully keeping the truths of God? Trav'ler, behold the pilgrim band! See! They are nearing the heav'nly strand; Some fall out by the way, but the host presses on; In Jesus' strength they conquer, When the victory is won.

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