

HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD

"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." Jeremiah 22:29.

An unparalleled crisis provoked this outcry. Days of devastation had dawned upon Israel, days that were soon to seal the doom of the profligate nation. Amid the lowering clouds of destruction one flash of saving light from God's high heaven illuminates that darkness. A light-bringer arises in the person of Jeremiah, whose mission pledges the mercy of God. With all the earnest entreaty of his impassioned soul he pleads with his people to repent and return to God, and to exercise justice and righteousness in dealing with their fellowmen; and in the name of God he promises a happier day, a day of dispelled gloom, and the restoration of His people to peace and prosperity. It would be difficult to read this electrifying outburst without looking deep into the soul of the prophet and finding there fires of an unquenchable passion for his nation's happiness, under God, for the reunion of his people with God, and for rich blessings upon his fellow-men.

As comprehensive as is this cry, "O earth, earth, earth!", for us, its force seems to focus itself upon our own anxious and disquieted nation. Our people need to hear the plea, "Hear the word of the Lord." For in spite of the lavish blessings showered upon us we have too often steeled ourselves stubbornly against the teachings of God's Word. Self-sufficient and self-confident, we have strained our ears, not for the words of the Lord, but for the words of men; and no age in American history has so tragically experienced the folly of that misplaced reliance as has our own. As yet, our people have not learned the folly of rejecting the Word of God. We have turned to many other places, deceiving ourselves with the thought that we might discover formulas to open the doors into a fairy wonderland of prosperity, but our problems are proving to be too profound for the best of brains.

How our churches need to heed this prophetic cry, "Hear the word of the Lord!" A highly organized effort is under way to dismantle the Christian faith and to foist upon our credulous age the word of men paraded as new, modern, enlightened, etc., although these delusions are as ancient as the hoariest heresies. Picture, if you will, the brilliant agnostics in almost every denomination who read from the Scriptures with fingers crossed, mental reservations, and tongues in their cheeks, who say they find as much or more truth in the writings of men, and who try to tear down the cross of Calvary as they erect the double cross of their own deceit. Think of the smooth oily denial of the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His vicarious death, atonement, resurrection, His coming to judge the quick and the dead, in brief, the denial of every fundamental truth of the gospel of Christ and the substitution of hazy theories and human inventions. Almost every major denomination is honeycombed with this disloyalty. Of course, the first step in the disintegration of any church is a compromising attitude toward the Word of God and the authorizing of teachers to undermine it.

The appeal of our text is to the individual to "Hear the word of the Lord," give it an abiding place in the heart and life, cherish it with reverent love, and proclaim it with heroic faith.

You may be disturbed by your sins, by the ease with which you yield to temptation, by your lack of resistance, and by your ability to say no to Satan. You know that, try as you will, impure thoughts, selfish desires, and lustful longings overpower you; and that the one evil impulse you expel from your heart returns with even more insidious temptations. You may cry out with Paul: "The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not,

that I do"; yet when you approach the Word of the Lord and raise your troubled eyes to God and hear Him pronounce His benediction: "My strength is made perfect in weakness," you have a power that is stronger than human might; you have the blood of Christ, which "cleanseth us from all sin."

The Holy Spirit can strengthen you and help you to enter upon the newness of the abundant and victorious life. God has all of the strength that you will ever need. What more sacred privilege and imperative duty is ours, in the storm and stress of these turbulent days, than to "hear the word of the Lord" with its warnings, its strengthenings, and its blessings? In that Word we shall discover that Christ is adequate for every crisis in life.

It is not easy to evaluate properly contemporary life. What seems to be important at the moment may fade into utter insignificance in no time at all. What appears to be inconsequential today, when tested by the tides of time, may turn out to be of supreme value tomorrow.

Paul in the city of Corinth is a striking example at this point. Commercially, politically, and philosophically, Corinth was the second city of the famous Roman Empire. It was the center of trade lines north and south, and of political movements east and west. It was a city of wealth, luxury, lust, plenty and pleasure -- where every physical appetite could be gratified to the fullest.

Into this city came a Christian Jew, walking the dusty road with sandaled feet, talking about a Peasant-Man Who had been crucified in Jerusalem, but Whom he claimed had been raised from the dead. Nobody in Corinth paid Paul much mind. He could scarcely find a place to lodge. Nineteen centuries later I visited the same place, and found only the ruins of that ancient city, but had the New Testament which contained Paul's writings in my pocket. The things for which foolish men and women contend, fight, and lose perish with the losing. But, in the brain of that Christian statesman were ideas which have shaped the thinking of many men through these nineteen centuries. Physical values perish, but spiritual values abide.

The world was passing through a colossal crisis at the time Paul was in Corinth. Changes were taking place more rapidly than men could record them. It was a crisis for spiritual religion, because Judaism, its highest exponent, was passing. It was a crisis in world politics, because the Roman Eagle, whose baleful wings had been spread over the then known world, was beginning to crumble. It was a crisis in world social affairs, because human relationships were being put on a different basis. It was a crisis in economic and industrial life.

Amid all these crises, Paul lifted up the Christ and said, "Here is your answer to every problem." Christ has always stood out more prominently, shone forth more gloriously, and towered more triumphantly in the midst of crises. A crisis is an challenge to strength. Weakness quails and fails in crises. This is why Paul presented Christ as the answer to human need. In every crisis of human history, Christ has met the challenge. He stands central, sufficient, and supreme in world history and world affairs.

Christ is central, geographically. The land where He was born, lived, worked, died, rose again, and from which He ascended to heaven is in the center of a world map.

Christ is central, chronologically. The date lines of history are marked "Before Christ" and "In The Year of Our Lord," The ancient world went to sleep in His cradle, and the modern world awoke out of His tomb.

Christ is central, theologically. Every statement of the Old Testament pointed forward to the Lamb of God, Who would take away the sin of the world. Every New Testament passage centers around the Christ Who bore our sins on the cross, Who was buried, Who arose, Who ascended, Who is interceding for us, and Who is coming again.

Christ is sufficient for every personal crisis. The supreme personal problems of life are: sin, sickness, suffering, and sorrow. Christ is sufficient for every sin, "for the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." He is able to make the vilest sinner clean. No man, however sinful, who comes to God through Christ is ever cast out. The almightiness of our Lord as a Saviour from sin has been demonstrated in millions of cases in which the libertine has been freed from his lust, the soiled sister of the street purified from her harlotry, the gambler transformed into an honest citizen, and the crook turned into a paragon of virtue. It is the supreme glory of Christ that He saves people from their sins. His statement, "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me," has brushed aside more tears from human eyes, has brought more gladness to human hearts, and has produced more singing in the midst of shadows than almost any other sentence that was ever spoken or written. His brotherly hand and His sweet and kindly face, and His gentle words have healed the hurt in human hearts, by the bedside of the sick, in the room of the dying, and at the open grave. Yes, Christ is sufficient for human crises. Christ is sufficient in men's social relationships, whether that relationship be between husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, capital and labor, or ruler and ruled.

There is the story of the futility by which the Continental Congress had been working. Then, the aged Benjamin Franklin arose to say: "Mr. President, I am convinced that we cannot reach agreements without that wisdom which comes from above. I have long observed the affairs of men in this regard. I suggest that we pause for prayer." They prayed, and guidance was given. The United States of America came into being. Yes, God as revealed in the grace and glory of His Son, Jesus Christ, can settle all human affairs, if only men submit them to Him.