

A WORD FROM THE LORD

"Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Jeremiah 37:17.

Zedekiah, the King of Judah, had come to a tragic hour. His little kingdom was in immediate danger of annihilation. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was pounding at the gates of Jerusalem. The doom of the city seemed inevitable. As the ungodly king felt the tottering of his nation, he suddenly became fearful and worried, and sent for the godly prophet, Jeremiah, who was imprisoned in a dungeon. When the persecuted preacher arrived at the palace, the King inquired, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Without any hesitation Jeremiah replied, "There is."

The man who asked this momentous question belonged to the class of solemn triflers. He came with the right question on his lips to the right person. He came to the man who had a living connection with God. Yet, we know, from the way he treated the answer to the question, that he came in the wrong spirit. He came and asked for the light from heaven, but he did not make any use of the light after it was given to him.

It is entirely possible for you and me to follow the example of Zedekiah. What is the spirit in which we come? Do we come in the spirit of Zedekiah, or in the spirit in which Saul of Tarsus came when he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" That question indicated that he was ready to take the step that God asked him to take, regardless of how much it cost. Do we approach the Lord with that spirit and attitude, or do we, like Zedekiah, come wanting to know what the word of the Lord is, but quite unprepared to act upon such information when it is received. May the Lord help us and keep us from trifling with such a solemn question as this.

If we look at the words of our text carefully, we shall notice two things:--

I. The Question That Was Asked.

The frightened king asked the fearless prophet, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Now a prophet is more than one who interprets the coming events by the shadows they cast before them. A prophet is much more than a man who can foretell when it will rain. A prophet is a man who has received a vital message from God and is willing to deliver it out of the overflowing fullness of his heart, regardless of the consequences to himself. A prophet is a man who knows what God has to say to men and is both willing and able to say it. Jeremiah the prophet was fearless whether in prison or in the palace, because he knew that he was standing in the presence of God to Whom he was personally and wholly responsible for what he said and did.

As long as the King had a ray of hope of being able to overcome, or of getting help from Egypt, he did not have any inclination to seek help from the prophet of God. When at last all hope of obtaining necessary help was gone, he had the prophet brought from prison into his presence and secretly sought his assistance, much as a scoffer secretly opens the Bible and tries to find out what the word of the Lord is.

Is there any word that God has to say to us? Does he have something specific to say to us? What is He wanting to say to us? Each of us should ask, "What does God say to me?" "Is there any word from the Lord?" I believe that there is a word from the Lord to us today.

II. The Answer That Was Given.

How did Jeremiah answer the question, "Is there any word from the Lord?" He replied at once, "There is." That is always the answer to this question. There is always a word from the Lord. The scriptures are timeless. Here in the Bible is the full and final revelation of God to man. Here is God's last word and His only word. All that God has to say to man is here in His Word. God does not have anything to add to what He has revealed. And the Bible is appropriate and up-to-date for every age. The final word of the Lord was spoken and recorded in the long ago, but until this day it has not been heeded by men.

Fearful that such a message should be one of doom, curious to learn what it might be, unwilling to heed it when he received it, and hopeful that word from the Lord might sanction his own predetermined course, an anxious king inquired, "Is there any word from the Lord?" In reply to Zedekiah's question, Jeremiah said: "There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." That was an honest, straightforward, blunt, and definite statement. Even though the fearless prophet told him that he would be handed over to the king of Babylon, Zedekiah did not hold any grudge against Jeremiah for speaking so plainly to him. He did not hold any unkind feelings towards him, but the very opposite.

When Zedekiah asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah did not hesitate to answer, "There is." Note that Jeremiah did not say, "I'm not sure"; or "I wish I knew"; or "I think perhaps there might be some word from the Lord"; or "Does it really matter if God has anything to say?" Jeremiah certainly did not reply, "No, there's no word from the Lord, for God is dead"; or "God, where is He?" I really do not know whether He is up there or down here." There was nothing like this about the prophet of God; there was no uncertainty, or hesitancy, or lack of authority in his reply. When the King asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah said: "There is." There is a very clear and definite word for us today, a word from the Lord Himself.

Perhaps nothing is needed more by our generation than a real word of authority from the Scriptures for our nation. There is a babel of voices raised in our national thinking today all crying out to be heard, but only a small percentage want to hear what the Lord has to say to them. There are many similarities between the nation over which Zedekiah reigned and our own nation now. In view of the perplexities of his statement and the incompetence of his religious leaders, King Zedekiah in desperation, and as a last resort, inquired if God had anything to say. One could almost wish that our plight were such that our leaders would be driven to turn from the opinions and policies of men to seek counsel from God and to receive the needed wisdom from Him.

There is a solemn word from the Lord for our nation. One fairly trembles for our nation today. God has been so good and so gracious to us, and has spared us many judgments that have fallen upon other nations, but in spite of all this sin is rampant on every hand. His Word and will are being disregarded, there is a godlessness and a carelessness on the part of the overwhelming majority of our people, and those who have the power and opportunity, as well as responsibility, to do something about stemming the tides of evil that are rising so alarmingly are doing little or nothing in that direction.

What is the word from the Lord for our nation? Surely, it is a word of warning that judgment must inevitably fall upon us unless we turn from our wicked ways and seek His face. Proverbs 14:34 says: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Evil brings people low. Of course, this is not the popular opinion, but is true just the same. If you should ask a group what exalts a nation, you will receive varied answers. Some would say that might exalts a nation. Others will say that money is what does it. It is not might, but right that exalts a nation. Ancient Rome had plenty of might. Why, then, do we read "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire?" Because underneath her might there was unrighteousness and Rome fell to pieces not through lack of might but through lack of right. Rome rotted away into ruin, as our own nation is now doing and for the same reason.

In 1787 Gibbon listed the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire as follows:

1. The decline of home life.
2. Higher and higher taxes, with more and more people living from the taxes paid by others.
3. A craze for pleasure and sports.
4. The building of a gigantic army, without thinking of the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion.

In the writing of the ancient nations, Matthew Arnold said, "Down they come, one after another, down they come: and every time for lack of righteousness."

Some would say that science exalts a nation. Never of itself. Japan took over to herself all our western sciences and was conquered by science.

Does education exalt a nation? Never, of itself. Nazi Germany led the world in the quest of culture and only succeeded in producing a race of cultured barbarians. Here in the United States there appeared a cartoon in the newspapers which showed two convicts talking together in their cell and one said proudly to the other: "When I get out of here, you know, I am going to the University. I am going to study and improve myself. And when you're still a common thief, I'll be an embezzler."

Does religion exalt a nation? Never, of itself. Italy is the home of one of the numerically great religions of the world, but has that exalted Italy? No. It is righteousness that exalteth a nation. As

righteousness decreases in our nation we are losing our power, prestige, and popularity. Righteousness is the only way out of our present woes. "Being justified by faith", or made righteous, "we have peace with God." Righteousness is the cause; peace is the effect. Righteousness is the root; peace is the fruit. Peace is produced only by righteousness. Wherever there is righteousness there is peace, and wherever righteousness is absent peace is lacking. Righteousness is the only way to fellowship with God. The supreme need of every person is to be right with God.

Is there any word from the Lord for each of us personally? Of course, there is. I want to mention some of the things the Lord wants to say to various ones of us. Is there any word from the Lord to the:--

1. Young Christians.

Yes, there is. Listen to this word of counsel from I Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." If you desire and feed upon "the milk of the Word," the Bible, you will grow spiritually; and this is the only way in which you can grow. The word of counsel for every person who has recently become a Christian is to feed upon the "milk", and later upon the "meat" of the Word of God.

2. Christians who lack assurance.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). God not only wants us to be saved, but He also wants us to be sure.

3. Backsliders.

A backslider is a disobedient Christian. To all such God says: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6). If any backslider will forsake the thing that is wrong, return to the Lord, He will welcome, pardon, and restore him to the joy of his salvation.

4. The perplexed and confused.

Is there any word for you in your perplexity about that particular matter for which you are thinking? Yes. There is a word of direction in Psalm 37:5, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." The Lord asks you to put yourself in His hands, your perplexity, your problem, in His hands, and then to trust Him to bring it to pass; that is, bring to pass all that will be for His glory, your good, and the good of all others who are concerned. Why not act upon His word of direction?

5. The discouraged.

To you who are distressed in mind and discouraged God says: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

If you will take this message right into your heart, it will banish discouragement and despair.

6. The mourners.

There are those who have lost their loved ones. Still others have suffered losses, and have passed through a time of great testing and trial. For those who need comfort there is an appropriate and helpful message in Psalm 50:15, which says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." What a word that is!

7. The unsaved.

May I give you the word of invitation found in Hebrews 3:7, "The Holy Ghost saith, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." The Holy Spirit is now inviting you to come to the Saviour and to put your trust in Him, thereby avoiding the danger of hardening your heart against His voice and the acceptance of His loving will for you. May you be given the grace to hear His word and to do His will. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."