

THE SECRET OF FAILURE

"Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you." Jeremiah 5:25.

Jeremiah is giving his explanation of a very sad and perplexing state of things. He came as a prophet of God to the people of God, to whom certain things had been promised.

When God had entered into covenant with His people He had said, "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). God had promised them ample provision, saying, "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely" (Leviticus 26:3-5). God had promised them peace: "And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land" (Leviticus 26:6). He had promised them joy, saying that they should serve the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart because of the abundance of all things (Deuteronomy 28:47).

Moreover, God had promised them prosperity, telling them that He would bless them in everything to which they put their hands. "The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Deuteronomy 28:8). He had promised them victory, saying, "And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight" (Leviticus 26:7-8). God had promised them honor. He said, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:1).

Such were the promises which God made to His chosen people — possession, provision, peace, joy, prosperity, victory and honor. The people desired these things, for they were in truth so desirable that none could fail to long for them, and yet they did not possess and enjoy them. Instead of ample provision there was scarcity. Instead of the land being watered by the early and the latter rains there was drought and famine. The people who should have been rejoicing were sad. The people who should have been victorious were paying tribute to foreign powers. The people who were to have been honored were a by-word among the nations.

What was the reason for their failure to realize the fulfillment of these promises? Was it because these promises were never meant to be fulfilled? Was it merely because God had failed to keep His promises? No! A thousand times, no! The correct explanation is far different. The entire blame was laid upon the people. In a single sentence that left nothing to be added Jeremiah wrote, "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you" (Jeremiah 5:25). The explanation of their deplorable state was found in the sins of the people, and not in any unfaithfulness on God's part.

Today the ministers of Christ are face to face with the very same problem that confronted and saddened the prophet Jeremiah long ago. We also come as messengers of God to speak to His people. We find that to God's people, who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, certain things have been promised. Among the wonderful things which God has promised Christians are the following:

1. Perfect forgiveness.

Our Lord said, "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).

2. Perfect peace.

Christ said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

3. Fulness of joy.

Our Lord said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). In writing to the Romans Paul said, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Romans 15:13).

4. Victory over sin.

Paul wrote this glorious promise of deliverance from the power of sin: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). He also wrote these words: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Galatians 5:16-18).

5. Provision for need.

"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Such are a few of the many promises which make the life of the believer full of the glory of God. To us as believers all these things are promised, and by us these things are desired. With a yearning that grows in intensity these things are desired, but are they possessed by us? Are there not many of us who have to confess that the higher experiences of the Christian life are almost unknown to us?

Many have not grasped and enjoyed God's perfect forgiveness. They do not have any assurance of their own salvation, but go about from day to day fearing that at last they may be lost. They do not have perfect peace. Their lives are a prey to anxiety and worry. Circumstances continually upset them. They lose their tempers and become irritable. They do not have the wonderful experience of the keeping power of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are not filled with joy, but are gloomy and despondent. They are not victorious, but are defeated. In the words of Paul they cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Romans 7:24)? They are unable to say with the Apostle, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Why are the lives of so many professing Christians so different from the life which is portrayed in the New Testament? What is the explanation of this obvious and painful contrast? Is it that the promises of God are not meant to be fulfilled? Is it that the life of the Christian, as described in the New Testament, is an ideal to which we are to strive continually, but with no possibility of ever reaching it? Has God been raising expectations in our minds only to disappoint us? No, the explanation is given in our text. Our lives, which are so full of desire, but so lacking in possession, constitute the secret of our failures. The explanation of our failures lies in ourselves. God's Word says, "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you." If we are to enter into the possession of our heritage in Christ, we must examine ourselves to discover our sins, and then to deal with God about them.

What is it in your life that keeps you from actually experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises? Is it some iniquity? Is it some act or habit of wrong doing? It may be some secret sin. It may be some habit of thought, some impurity of imagination or some sinfulness of speech. It may be some habit which breaks and prevents your fellowship with God. Does your trouble lie in your conformity to the world? Do you indulge in the pleasures of the world in disobedience to the command, "Come ye out, and be separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (II Corinthians 6:17)?

Remember that sin, when it is cherished, turns blessings away. Iniquity persisted in cancels the divine promise. The Israelites found it that way. Their disobedience changed the blessing into a curse. So we will find it. It will be impossible for us to enjoy the consciousness of the divine favor and blessing if we are living in a manner that is displeasing to God.

Perhaps what is keeping us from receiving the blessing may not be so much an iniquity as a sin. It may not be so much an act of transgression as an act of disobedience. It may be that you are refusing to do what God has commanded rather than doing what He has forbidden. In disobedience to a divine command, as well as in transgression of the divine law, may be found the cause that hinders us from entering into the fullness of blessing.

Have you discovered the secret of the barrenness of your spiritual life? Has the light of God revealed the cursed thing that is bringing disaster into your spiritual life? If you are guilty before God, what are you to do?

1. Confess your sin.

Simply say, "Lord, I have sinned in this matter. I have been inconsiderate, proud and worldly. I have neglected prayer, Bible study and public worship. I have not been faithful in witnessing for Christ." Name your sin or your iniquity before God; be specific in your confession. It may be painful and humbling to do so, but that will be a condition of blessing. If we would receive those blessings which our iniquities have turned away from us the first thing for us to do is to make a full confession to God.

2. Renounce your sin.

Resolve to be done with it and separate yourself from it. Confession without renunciation is worse than useless. It is the renunciation that shows that the confession is backed by penitence. God's Word says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Make a definite renunciation of what has hindered you and deprived you of so many blessings. What God has asked you to do He will enable you to perform.

3. Resolve to obey God.

You have to deal not only with iniquities, but with sins; not only with transgressions, but with shortcomings. Therefore, you must resolve to do what God commands, as well as not to do what He forbids. You are asked to make your will conform to God's will. Are you willing to give more time to prayer and to Bible study? Are you willing to speak to that soul about Christ? Until you are, God will not bless you as fully as you desire.

4. Commit yourself to God.

Give yourself to God as you are in order that He may deal with you as your case requires. Bring all of your guilt, shame and failure to Him and lay them at His feet. Then, you will hear Him saying, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Your renunciation of your sins and your dedication of self to God will be followed by His deliverance and blessing. When you tell Him that your strength of will is not sufficient for these things, He will reply, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Remember that the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

If you, as a Christian, will only follow the course which has been prescribed, you will find that the windows of heaven will be opened and such blessings will be poured out that you will not have room enough to receive all of them.