

IS THERE ANY 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).

This is a dazed world. That night when Jesus Christ was lying prostrate beneath the moon-silvered olive trees in Gethsemane, Jerusalem was a city of confused counsels and seething turmoil. There were the Pharisees, determined at all costs that nothing should break the hard mould into which their religious life had frozen. There were the Sadducees, who represented the rich and the comfortable, who were skeptical of anything supernatural in religion, who wanted nothing to interfere with their gospel of worldly success. There were the Romans, with their pagan contempt for religion in general and their pagan reliance upon political and military power to solve all problems. And there were the indifferent crowds made up of society's rank-and-filers, with few if any convictions of their own, just waiting for the next thing to happen. About the only thing they all agreed on was that Jesus Christ wasn't a very important or necessary person to have around. A few were for Him; more were against Him; most just didn't care.

The differences between that situation and the one in which the world finds itself today are not very great if it is our significant attitudes toward life that we have in mind. We have our Pharisees. We have our Sadducees. We have our pagans. And we have our unconcerned masses with their ideas and emotions made up for them on the mammoth assembly line of the modern radio, press and television. We are certainly in a devilish dither.

The world is dazed, for example, by its own contradictions: the contradiction between its talk of peace and its preparations for war, the contradiction between its ideals of democracy and its undemocratic inequalities and injustices, the contradiction between its scientific inventiveness and its scientific destructiveness.

The world is dazed by its physical and social disintegrations: the break-up of marriage and family life, the appalling rise in alcoholism, the increasing debauchery of the tastes and inclinations of the people who seek some sort of pleasure-escape from the intolerable burdens of life.

The world is dazed by its disillusionments and frustrations: Orientals are disillusioned about the help they can count on from the Western democracies; Occidentals are disillusioned about human leadership; and throngs of people are disillusioned about the ultimate effectiveness of war in preserving freedom and democracy.

This is a bewildered world. Lifting troubled, tortured, anguish-stricken eyes, one was heard to say, "Frankly, I have come to the place that I don't know what to believe." He was simply stating the bewilderment which is so characteristic of many today. Many are confused because heartless barbarism, blood-chilling cruelty and indescribable destruction are so widespread. Religiously there are all shades

of thought from red-hot fanaticism to hard-hearted indifference. Numerous voices are being heard in our bewildered world which is groping in confusion and darkness.

We are certainly living in a time of trouble. One wonders if any other generation has ever lived in such troublous times. It would be unfair to minimize the difficulties faced by those of yesteryears, and yet ours is a time of great and numerous troubles. Never before has man had so many things to disturb his peace of mind and soul as we have now. A listing of our problems would include the following: creeping socialism, inflation, juvenile delinquency, divorce, immorality in high places, emotional instability, mental breakdown, leisure time, mortgage payments, high interest rates, automation, automobile safety, air pollution, gun control laws, alcoholism, dope addiction, marital infidelity, pornography, rape, murder, theft, education, unrest among minority groups, the ugly American image created in large measure by the demonstrations on the campuses of our educational institutions and the race riots in our streets, and many others.

Against the background of this troubled generation there are several attitudes that may be taken. We can try to get away from it all by self-destruction, but suicide is the coward's way out. We can deny any responsibility for trying to change what is wrong. We can seek the life of a hermit so as not to be involved, but trying to withdraw from society goes against the natural order of man's existence, for God was wise enough to so fix it that our lives are incomplete without each other. Refusal to have any part in changing what is wrong is selfish, irresponsible and lazy. We can attempt to drown our sorrows in alcohol or in taking a flight into the fanciful world of dope, but to seek relief from alcohol, narcotics or self-indulged lust creates more problems than it solves. We can "lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help." This is the source to which we must turn in troublous times.

In troublous times like these, we would do well to study the message which is recorded in Jeremiah 37.

As Zedekiah, the ungodly king of Judah, felt the tottering of his small kingdom, he suddenly became fearful and worried, and he sent for the godly prophet, Jeremiah, who was imprisoned in the dungeon. As soon as the persecuted preacher arrived at the palace, Zedekiah inquired, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Without hesitation Jeremiah replied, "There is."

The man who asked this momentous question was a solemn trifler. He came to the right person with the right question on his lips. 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 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 keep us from trifling with such a solemn question as this.

Note the question that the frightened king asked a fearless prophet, "Is there any word from the Lord?" The prophet had received a vital message from God and was willing to deliver it out of the overflowing fulness of his heart, regardless of the consequences to himself. He knew what God had to say and was both willing and able to express it. Whether in prison or in the palace, Jeremiah was fearless, because he knew that he was standing in the presence of God to Whom he was personally 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 the necessary help was gone, he had the prophet brought before 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.

In times like these, is there any word that God has to say to us? Does He have something specific to say to us? In the words of Jeremiah "There is." There is always a word from the Lord. It is interesting to 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 "It doesn't really matter whether or not God has anything to say." There was no uncertainty or lack of authority in Jeremiah's answer, "There is."

There is nothing which is needed more by our generation than the word of authority from the Scriptures. Many voices are being raised in our nation today. All of them are crying out to be heard, but so few of our people want to hear what the Lord has to say to them. 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. One fairly trembles for our nation. 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 of 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 it is true just the same. If you should ask a group what exalts a nation, you will receive various answers. Some would say that might exalts a nation. Others will say that money is what exalts a nation. 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 writing of the ancient nations, Matthew Arnold said, "Down they come, one after another, down they come; and every time for lack of righteousness."

Does education exalt a nation? Never, of itself. Nazi Germany led the world in the quest of culture and succeeded in producing multitudes of cultured barbarians. Twenty one cultures have been born and have flourished in recorded history, and sixteen of them have destroyed themselves. Arnold Toynbee has reminded us that the five remaining cultures are sick.

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 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 the be right with God.

In times like these it is good to know that personal help from God is available to us. There are people whose the manifestation of the goodness of God and respond to Him with trust and confidence that make the dark days look much brighter, and the bad days look so much better. Trust in God makes life worth living.

In this fast moving world of ours, thought has become a luxury. Giving time for thought about anything is looked upon almost like an extravagance. When we can no longer think about God, man, ourselves, and the great issues of life and death, we have become more like machines than men. We need to learn by experience to put all of our faith and trust in God, as the Psalmist did, so that in times of trouble we can lift up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help.

Night had begun to fall, and the little band of travelers had stopped to camp. There was no police force around to keep law and order. Marauding robbers roamed the hills, and wild beasts had been known to attack travelers sitting around the camp-fire or sleeping about its dying embers. When the Psalmist looked up to the hills ringing the valley, he remembered the guardian God of Israel, His existence solid as the hills, and His love just as firm. Knowing full well the dangers of the road ahead, he said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." Come what may, he would trust in God and would not be afraid. The night did not hold any terrors for him because he trusted in God. God, Who made heaven and earth, is to be depended upon or trusted. He is God of the night as well as of the day, of the dark day as well as of the bright day, in the troublous times as well as in the good times.

God sees His people through the night and He sees them through the day. Day has its own dangers for both the young and the old. The heat is on during the day; yet one must keep on going. The pressure is terrific, the voice of necessity is sharp and the competition is keen. Who knows better than the people of the twentieth century how tough the day really is, with all of its conflict, its restlessness, its disturbances, its hatred and warfare between man and man, between class and class, and between people and people? There are those who are so overwhelmed by the malice of others and by their own mistakes that they have begun to wonder whether or not it is worthwhile to go on living. There is so much confusion in the world even over what is right and wrong that many have begun to wonder if things will ever be set right again. Many have conceded that evil has won the day and rules the night.

Thank God, we know better. No matter how black things may look, there is always God. God knows what He is doing, and He cares for His children who do not know which way to turn. The Psalmist says, "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." What glorious promises! Put your trust in Him, and let His promise come true for you.

Christian, the Lord will keep you from all evil; maybe not from pain, disappointment, bereavement, sorrow, or the termination of life on earth which we call death, but He will keep you from all evil. All will be well in Christ. Put your trust in Him and let the Lord keep you.

Unsaved friends, 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. In Hebrews 3:7 we read, "The Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." May you be given the grace to hear His Word and to do His will! "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."