

STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." Jeremiah 6:16.

It was not an easy task to which God called Jeremiah, when He commissioned the prophet to go and stand at the crossroads--at the place where the various types of humanity were surging by--and see if he could not influence them to conform to the will of God. Jeremiah was not anxious to undertake the task because it was exceedingly difficult.

Everywhere he looked Jeremiah could see signs of national decay. As a military power Judah had become impotent. Between Chaldes on the north and Egypt on the south, she was being slowly ground to pieces as between the upper and the nether millstones. When he turned from the nation to the individual, he found an even greater tragedy. He said, "From the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness." The religious life of the people was at a low ebb. There was unrest and anxiety in the land because a strong foe, "cloud-like in numbers and vulture-like in speed," threatened to attack at any time. It was not the danger from without, however, that filled the heart of the prophet with fear; his distress sprang from the spiritual apathy among his own people.

In this chapter Jeremiah bewails the wanderings of the Jews from the ways of truth and righteousness, and exhorts them to return to the "old paths." With a clear picture of their wretched condition before him, he exhorts them to repent and to get back into the old paths of truth and virtue. He urged the people to stand still, to look carefully at the old ways, to consider them fairly and with an open mind and to see whether after all they were not the best ways in which to walk.

In a time of crisis and impending danger people react in different ways. There are those who give themselves up almost entirely to frivolity and amusement while others are alert to exploit the situation for selfish ends. Some give way to fatalism and despair while others find comfort in dwelling on a distant past when--as they would have you believe--no such dangers, perplexities or troubles existed to vex mankind. Just as every succeeding age brings its own peculiar problems and difficulties, every age is a time of crisis and of stern challenge.

I. The Request.

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein." Human nature has not changed much since the days of Jeremiah. People are nearly always prone to think because a thing is old, therefore, it must be outworn; and because a thing is new, therefore, it must be true. The itch for novelty has been a characteristic of people in every age. The craving is for something new, in dress, in medicine, in books and everything else. The craze for novelty has also affected the outlook in religion for many are looking, not for something that is true, but for something that is new. When Paul went to Athens, he discovered that those who gathered to hear him "spent their time in nothing else but hearing and speaking something new."

We are living in an age in which there is a fierce conflict between the old and the new. This conflict is not confined to things temporal, but extends into the realm of religion. There are those who are attempting to lead us away from the faith and practices of our fathers, and to commit us to a view of Christianity which contradicts every great fundamental doctrine of the Bible. In view of this fact, we must cling to the faith in which our fathers lived and died.

Jeremiah's appeal to his countrymen in the end makes it clear that a path is not necessarily the right and best one merely because it is old. The people are called to discover which among the old paths are the good ways, and to walk therein. There are certain paths, for instance, in which men rightly trod in days gone by, but that

fact of itself does not commit us to the self-same paths. Age alone does not make anything holy.

Jeremiah's advice was excellent. "Stand, and see, and ask" constitute a call to thought and consideration. That meant "Stop, stand still, think and reflect. Look within, behind and before. Stop and think of what will be the end and consequence of your present line of action."

If ever there was an age when his advice was needed, it is now. Hurry is the characteristic of the age in which we live. Many seem unable to find time for calm and serious reflection about the state of their souls.

What is meant by the "old paths"? Doubtless the phrase means the old paths of faith in which the fathers of Israel had walked for hundreds of years--the paths in which the rule of life was the ten commandments, and the rule of worship was that elaborate, typical, sacrificial system of which the essence was faith in the coming Redeemer.

"Ask for the old paths" which lead back to the places of prayer and dedication. Our Hebrew brethren saw Jacob go back to Bethel to the place where he met God, and heard him make a vow unto Him that if He would bring him to his father's house in peace that he would recognize the place as "God's house," and that he would surely give Him a tithe of all he had. The early disciples saw the Lord Jesus Christ go into the quiet places for prayer until they had to cry out, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Our forefathers emphasized the devotional life. Into solitary rooms, quiet groves, chapels, churches and schoolhouses they went for the purpose of quiet communion with God. They prayed alone, they prayed in family circles, they prayed in little groups; and they never thought of trying to have a revival without much prayer.

Our country was founded by praying men. The first English settlement in America was in Virginia 1607, and the first house erected was a place of worship. When the Huguenots first landed in the Carolinas they joined in a service of praise to God for hearing and answering their prayers and for giving them a home in a land of freedom.

When the Federal Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787 for the purpose of framing the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin introduced a resolution that the meetings should always be opened with prayer.

When General Washington's Army was encamped at Valley Forge, he saw something that touched his heart--bloodstains on the snow as his men marched by. He excused himself from his army and went away into the woods to pray. An old settler who happened to be passing that way, saw Washington kneeling in the snow in prayer, and ran home to his wife, and exclaimed: "Hannah, Hannah, George Washington will succeed, George Washington will succeed for I just saw him down on his knees in prayer!" And he did succeed.

When our forefathers began to mint and circulate gold and silver coins they stamped on each one "In God We Trust."

We should ask for the old paths which lead to the inspired Word of God. There was a time, in our American life, when the Word of God was read and appropriated and appreciated, but today hundreds of other periodicals have come in to take the place of the Bible. The Bible, therefore, has been relegated to the forgotten shelf or placed away in some concealed place.

We, too, are living in a time when some are trying to denature the Bible by putting it down on the same plane with history, English and science. But the Bible is the inspired Word of God and must ever be taught by redeemed and consecrated men and women. It is a spiritual book for spiritual people. Let me urge you to learn it, love it and live it.

As touching life as a whole, both for individuals and nations, and in every age, the old and proved paths of penitence and faith, of prayer and obedience, of righteousness and holiness, of mercy and truth, of self-forgetfulness and sacrificial service and forgiving love are still the good ways wherein if men will diligently walk they shall discover for themselves the richest blessings of God. These were the paths in which Christ trod and in which He has called men to walk.

There are two things which we much consider concerning what Jeremiah calls the good way.

1. It may not be the attractive way.

"There is a way, which seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof is the way of death." It may seem good for a boy to leave school at the first possible moment because he wants to earn money. But that way may lead him to a dead end, for he may find himself in the ranks of the unskilled with no future before him. The good way is not by any means always the attractive way.

2. It may not be the popular way.

I am well aware that the old paths are not popular in many quarters today. Tell many that any religious idea is old, and they seem to think it is false. Tell them that it is new, and many will conclude that it is true. Our Lord warned us that the good way may not be the popular way when He said concerning the broad way, "Many there be that go in thereat." Many are tempted to think that because a way is popular it must somehow be right.

God told the prophet that it was his responsibility not only to get the people to yearn and to ask for the old paths, but also to walk in them. It is not enough just to be orthodox in head. We must be orthodox in hand as well. We must be "doers" of the Word. Most church members would rather be signboards pointing out the way than a pilgrim walking in the way. When Jesus said, "If you know these things happy are ye if you do them," He made out the best program of happiness and usefulness the world has ever seen. In brief He said, "Know something, do something and enjoy something." We must walk in the paths of prayer, Bible study and church attendance if the power of prayer is felt and the light of inspiration is seen and the fellowship of saints is enjoyed.

II. The Result.

"And ye shall find rest for your souls." It is the distinguishing mark of the "good" and "old" way that in it men find rest for their souls. But rest is never found apart from faith in Christ. By asking for and walking in the old paths--the true and tried paths--you will be able to enjoy the greatest thing in life, soul rest. "Ye shall find rest unto your souls." True religion has at least three dimensions: height, depth and length. It reaches up and touches God, it reaches down and touches the deepest part of man, the soul, and it reaches out and touches every needy soul. All need that rest which comes from inward harmony with God.

Listen as the great Galilean says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Nothing could be held out to man more suitable to his spiritual wants than "rest". Rest of soul is the secret want of the vast portion of mankind. The rest that Christ gives in the "old paths" is an inward thing. It is rest of heart, rest of conscience, rest of mind, rest of affection and rest of will.

Is there anyone listening to me who is desirous of rest of soul, and yet knows not where it can be found. Governments cannot give it; education will not impart it; worldly amusements cannot supply it; money cannot purchase it. It can only be found in Christ. There is only one way to the Father--Jesus Christ; one door to heaven--Jesus Christ; and one path to heart-peace--Jesus Christ. Real heart-rest is never to be found except in heart-union with Jesus Christ.