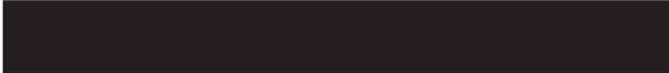




A Prophetic Voice

Against The Times



Joy Thomas

A Prophetic Voice Against The Times

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INTRODUCTION

Act 13:27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

Act 13:27 (Amplified Bible): For those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not know or recognize Him or understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, have actually fulfilled these very predictions by condemning and sentencing [Him].

The scriptures make it abundantly clear that though the people of God gathered solemnly, Sabbath after Sabbath, they failed to hear the voices of the prophets. Though God's deep desire and longing for His people has been that they may detect and discern the voices of the prophets and that through hearing them they may come into a place of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, in all their coming together, Sabbath after Sabbath, they missed the voice of the

prophets! The tragedy was that they not only missed the voices of the prophets, but they became antagonistic towards the very things that the prophets spoke.

God is always concerned that His people hear Him when He speaks to them through His prophets. Isaiah 6 shows that when God's people refused to hear the prophets, God closed their eyes and shut their ears. The prophet Isaiah was commissioned with such a ministry. It was unique in so many ways. **The more God spoke through him, the more God closed the eyes and ears of the Israelites.** The people could not see or hear the things of God because they refused to hear the prophets. And this can happen even today. O how dangerous a place it is for God's people. There comes a time when the more we hear, the more we are unable to really hear the Lord and His Spirit! As the Apostle Paul says *"Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Tim 3:7)

Let us note **that the failure and its consequences referred to in Acts 13 were not because the prophets were not faithful but because their teachers and leaders were**

unfaithful and sought personal gain! God had His true prophets speaking His voice in the midst of those prophets who went after their own gain. Let me illustrate this with the example of a child at school. If a child is not doing well in studies, one cannot always put the blame on the teacher! It could be that some teachers were not good enough or not dedicated enough. Failure could also be attributable to a lazy, indolent, careless and rebellious child. Though there would always be some teachers who would be sincere and committed, the fact is that the best and most painstaking teacher could also be prone to failures and limitations. **Though God's true prophets gave all that they had, the terrible verdict of, "they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets" was true. The blame rested squarely upon the hearers!**

Beloved, we must all realize that the voice of God has a definite purpose in the lives of God's people. Hearing the voice of God should result in coming into a place where the remnant has a greater knowledge of Christ and an increased measure of His presence. God is in need of men and women

who will hear His voice and know His will in this hour. If we, as His remnant, are to become a voice for God, we need to first hear the voices of the prophets in our generation. In the past, the people of God refused to hear the voices of the prophets and thus missed God and God's purpose in His Son. They turned against God and violently opposed Him and His prophets and finally rejected His Son, Jesus Christ. Prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and many others faced an unruly mob that refused to believe the voice of God that came to them. I am led of the Lord to share the life of Jeremiah the prophet who stands as a precious example in history. However, in meditating on the book of Jeremiah, we will not contemplate upon history and geography nor the chronology of the prophets, but try to see the underlying spiritual message and the burden of the Spirit of God. I was drawn in my spirit to this prophet in particular.

JEREMIAH'S
SORROW OF LOVE

As I read the book of Jeremiah, I am touched with the sense that Jeremiah comes

nearer to the heart of personal spiritual need. The book is all about the man himself; his own sufferings dominate the book. Whereas prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel had in view nations, rulers, the making of history (for a long time to come), predictions of the future and immense visions, Jeremiah had comparatively less of these features. **But this man had a heart to hear what things brought sorrow upon the heart of God.** The man went through a great deal of suffering himself to understand this. The book of Jeremiah is filled with accounts of his own sorrows and sufferings that identified with the grief upon God's heart. Several scholars call Jeremiah the 'weeping' prophet. His sorrow did not reflect the sorrow of his own heart, but it reflected upon the sorrow upon God's heart as seen by Jeremiah. Comparatively speaking, Jeremiah was burdened with the present and the immediate course of things. What impresses the reader above all else is the personal distress of the prophet, quite apart from whatever he had to say about the nations in Chapters 40 to 50. We see his personal distress, his immense sorrowfulness, his mourning and bereavement because of the things he saw.

So the message comes really out of the prophet himself! We shall see that this is true of all prophets. However, the personality of Jeremiah is seen more clearly than any other Major Prophets and many of the Minor Prophets as well. Through Jeremiah's personality great truths were converted into spiritual life. While much of the same may be said of other prophets, perhaps it is true to say that no man was ever more - if as much - integrated with his message than was Jeremiah. It was literally wrung out of him like the juice crushed out in the wine-press.

The function of the prophets in the Old Testament was pre-eminently to keep closely and powerfully, before the people what God is like. If we keep this principle in mind we have a key to understand each prophet in the Scriptures! A man of God said about Jeremiah, "There are grounds for believing that the Figure of the Suffering Servant of the Lord, raised by the Great Prophet of the Exile, and the idea of the atoning and redemptive value of His sufferings were, in part at least, the results of meditation upon the spiritual loneliness on the one side, and upon the passionate identification of himself with the

sorrows of his sinful people on the other side, of this the likes to Christ of all the Prophets." Certainly Jeremiah foreshadowed the greater than he who was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief' (Isaiah 53:3). Christ was foreshadowed by the life of Jeremiah in one important aspect namely the sorrow of heart. This shows very clearly that as a prophet Jeremiah had a specific call upon his life.

Our God is a God of many characteristics and virtues! In other words our God is vary-sided. **We know that God is love but we need to also know that His love has many sides to it.** His love has many facets and many aspects. **It is a many-sided love.** And there is a quality of God's love that may be called 'a sorrow of His love'. There is also a jealousy of His love and there is also a wrath in His love. We read of such a love of God in the Scriptures and we gather an insight and an understanding of His love when we read His Word. **We can even see a kind of hatred in His love in the Scriptures.** Truly God has many virtues and His love is one of the dominant virtues that we read of in the Bible.

Jeremiah was the embodiment of the sorrow of God's love. In the life of Jeremiah one is able to see the purity and the depths of God's sorrow for His people. We can see the reason why God called Jeremiah to reflect the sorrow of His love. And He made him an instrument to reveal it to God's people. We are living in days similar to the days of Jeremiah amongst God's people. I believe that in these days, in the times in which we are living, God wants to convey to His people the sorrow of His love. Many people talk so much about God's love, but they do not realize that His love is many-sided. Generally, people talk about God's love in a man-centered way because they want every blessing to flow from God's love into their lives regardless of their self-centered lives. And they are not open to see the many-sided love of God. The course of God's people today is similar to the course of His people in Jeremiah's time, when God needed a voice to show forth His sorrow and love in their midst. God needed the voice of a man who could express the sorrow of His love. God is in need of voices to express the sorrow of His love in these perilous days of departure and decline! The trend today is that

everybody wants to be a voice to express God's love, but the Lord is looking for vessels to express the sorrow of His love. **This was very true in the days of Jeremiah. The majority of prophets spoke "peace, peace" but only Jeremiah could express the sorrow and hatred of God's love!**

Before we go further into the course and reasons for God's sorrow, we will look at the man Jeremiah himself. **There is so much here to help any child of God or servant of God who has to take an unpopular way, plough a lonely furrow, stand against**

a strong adverse current, and bear the unwelcome testimony. Jeremiah can be a great inspiration for all who take up the unpopular way and plough the lonely furrow, standing against every adverse current and bear the unwelcome testimony of the Lord in the **crucial days of decline and apostasy.**

There is a quality of God's love that may be called 'a sorrow of His love'.

There is also a jealousy of His love and there is also a wrath in His love!

There are many things in the man Jeremiah himself — his call, his vocation, his work, his occupation and his profession. There was so much that the Holy Spirit could draw upon from Jeremiah's life and character that would minister to the people of God, then and even now. There are not many men today from whose lives the Holy Spirit can draw and minister the expression of God's heart in these days. Truly, there is not much that the Holy Spirit can draw upon from any man today. Saints, today everything is not well with God's people, but in Jeremiah, we find a man, a servant of the Lord, who shared the sorrow and the pain of the Lord! Here was a man who was drawn to the Lord and came so near to Him that he could have close fellowship with the Lord. He went the unpopular way and stands as an example to encourage every man who would care to embrace the ostracized way for he was one who ploughed alone, away from everyone else.

In these days, not many people choose to plough the lonely field or go into that which is known as unpopular. But praise God there are some, not many but some, who refuse to

be a part of that which others find good and pleasant. There are but a few who are willing to plough alone and keep themselves away from the fields of popular Christianity. **They feel called to stand against the strong currents of the evangelical and charismatic world and therefore, they choose to go it alone though it would mean much suffering and rejection.** People do not want to stand and bear an unwelcome testimony in this hour. **They are more concerned about their personal testimony and their ministry than the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.** Therefore, those who stand for the testimony of Jesus Christ today are an unwelcome lot. They suffer a reproach. Their consolation is that God is vitally concerned about His testimony at their hands rather than about their ministry and work unto the Lord.

In Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation we find that the churches were filled with people who were satisfied doing many works unto the Lord:

Rev 2:2 "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them

which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”

Rev 2:3 “And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”

The Lord did not ignore their works and labour but He said, “I know thy works; I know thy labour; I know thy patience.” Here we find a church that was not behind in the matter of ministry and work, but yet it stood in danger of being removed from His presence. The Lord says that He would remove their lampstand—that He would not allow them to continue in the way they were moving. **Here we see the Lord judging His churches in the light of His testimony and not in the light of their work, however dedicated and devoted they were.** Today the church persuades and challenges God’s people to labor and work hard for the Lord. The emphasis in churches all around is on service and upon doing some work for the Lord, whereas the Lord is more concerned about His testimony. **The seven churches in Revelation were judged in the light of His testimony.** These churches were brought

into existence to bear the light of His testimony. They were constituted to this end. **But when they failed to bear His testimony, when there was no moral and spiritual ground for their continuation, then the verdict of the Lord came upon them! Has God changed the standard of His judgments for us today? No, He has not!** The people of God today have lost the purpose of their salvation. Churches have become a platform for social work and a stage for political and other activities which seem good and favourable in the eyes of man. Looking around we see that the Church is least concerned about the testimony of Jesus Christ; they are concerned more about their own ministry, their own name, and their own kingdoms!

Jeremiah was a man who stood alone for the testimony of the Lord and for the name of the Lord. His ministry was far from welcome to the people. Beloved, God is calling a people to stand for His testimony even if they have to stand for it alone. Jeremiah can be a great inspiration to all of us in such a ministry. The Lord drew my heart towards this man who suffered alone for the establishment of the Lord's testimony in the land. His example

strengthened my being and enabled me to see the need for the ministry to stand against every popular current and wind. Saints, I perceive that there are many strong currents and winds blowing today. Many sincere people are being swept away. Recently, I got to hear about the compromising stand of some dear brothers I knew personally. It brings great sorrow to hear about sincere people being drawn away into the present trend of things. Jeremiah is a great inspiration to those who choose to walk the unpopular way. He inspires all who want to share the heart of God in this hour and time. **Christians today are, by and large, looking for good times with the Lord. They are looking for 'green-pasture' pastors! Ministries are proving to be self-centered rather than God-centered.** May the Lord show us the concern of His heart! May that be our primary concern in these days.

**GOD HAS PROVIDED
SOMETHING BETTER FOR YOU**

*Jer 1:1 "The words of Jeremiah the son of
Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth*

in the land of Benjamin:"

Jer 1:2 "To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign."

Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah, was a priest in the land of Benjamin. Jeremiah could have easily inherited the tradition of an illustrious ancestry. His early life could have been moulded by the distinctive religious influences that he belonged to. He could have inherited the priestly tradition of his family and become a priest, serving the Lord in the temple. He could easily have inherited the ancestral calling because he was the son of a priest, like the prophet Ezekiel, in which case his life would have been moulded by the distinctive religious system of his time. The influences of his community would have groomed him, shaped him and molded him in no uncertain ways. There would have been no sorrows, no sufferings and no reproaches or rejections! **But God had 'provided some better things for this young man than to spend his days in serving at the altars of a proscribed and degenerate priesthood!** His heart was open to what God had for him.

This young man's life was destined for something far greater and higher in the Lord. The young son of Hilkiyah had been appointed to the tremendous destiny of being a prophet of the Lord in one of the most testing hours in the history of God's chosen people. He had a remarkable destiny in the land of Israel at a crucial time in their history. Israel was going through a most trying and testing time. It was a crucial hour in the life and history of God's people. And at such a juncture, God



called Jeremiah to be a testimony and a voice for Him!

I know for sure that I would have been serving at the altars of a proscribed and degenerate priesthood or spiritual system today, but for the mercies of God.



There is a tremendous call and destiny resting upon each one of us. I know for sure that I would have been serving at the altars of a proscribed and degenerate priesthood or spiritual system today, but for the mercies of God.

He, having provided me some better things,

and did not let me waste my life in that religious system. I am able to see several sincere people vexing their lives, having been caught up in that religious system, serving the altars of a degraded religious system for many years. **Saints, you would have been serving at the altars of a degenerated spiritual system today; you would have been caught up in the system of which you were a part of at one time; you could have continued with a religious system, but God in His mercy, having provided some better things for you, did not allow you to spend the rest of your life serving at altars which are degenerating.** Not only that, God is causing you to see that which is upon His heart.

Beloved, by the mercy of God we are called to be separated unto the Lord. This is the most testing and trying hour in the history of God's people. If we want to have the best of both the worlds, the earthly and the heavenly, we shall be exposed very soon. A compromiser can never walk this lonely path. **The cost we have paid in the past is no guarantee that we will not become compromisers or withdraw under**

pressure. The cost, the pain, the sorrow, the losses we have incurred will not help us to stand as un-compromisers in this hour. Many men of God who had made great sacrifices in the past are now living in compromise. The sacrifices they made in the past could not guarantee them a safe and secure life; the good feelings they had after they had made sacrifices unto the Lord could not help them stand before God without guilt and blame. **Consider the lives of Saul, Jonathan and many others who had obeyed the Lord at one time but later they compromised and fell away from their commitments.** Their enemies pinned their bodies on the walls of Bethshan (1 Sam 31:12)! They fought against God's enemies at one time, but they died in disgrace and the Lord was not with them. **Saul and Jonathan fought against the Philistines, who were God's enemies, but later they were not found in the purposes of God.** Many times we think that because we are on God's side fighting His enemies, we will not compromise or withdraw from this calling and purpose later. This attitude is totally wrong. History has repeatedly shown this to us. The obedience, the sacrifices, the good deeds, and the devoted works we may

have had in the past are no guarantee for today. **The sacrifices of yesterday are no excuse for compromising today.** We have a striking example of believers in Hebrews 10:32-36:

Heb 10 (AMP)

32 But be ever mindful of the days gone by in which, after you were first spiritually enlightened, you endured a great and painful struggle,

33 Sometimes being yourselves a gazingstock, publicly exposed to insults and abuse and distress, and sometimes claiming fellowship and making common cause with others who were so treated.

34 For you did sympathize and suffer along with those who were imprisoned, and you bore cheerfully the plundering of your belongings and the confiscation of your property, in the knowledge and consciousness that you yourselves had a better and lasting possession.

35 Do not, therefore, fling away your fearless confidence, for it carries a great and glorious compensation of reward.

36 For you have need of steadfast patience and endurance, so that you may perform and fully accomplish the will of God, and thus receive and carry away [and enjoy to the full] what is promised.

These early saints suffered much more than most of us, yet when the Apostle wrote this letter they were out of focus and withdrawing. They began to bring Judaism into their present Christian faith from which they had separated at one time. They suffered many things because of this separation. They had to be reminded again and be refocused on the Lord. We need to walk carefully today for we cannot depend on the securities of the past. **We do not know our tomorrows, but today we must walk close to the Lord.** Therefore today when we hear His voice let us not shut our ears and close our eyes. We are living in the most trying and testing time in history. We thank God that in His mercy He has opened our eyes to see this call in Christ. But let us remember that we cannot be compromisers and take a middle path. This call is precious and also unpopular; we have to know this from day one itself. Every time the enemy puts pressure on us, he seeks

to compel us to compromise. Christians have bowed down to such pressure and compromised with the world innumerable times. Hence, let us all take heed!

Saints, we have to be serious with this call. Those who take the middle path, the neutral and the safe zone will find it very difficult to adjust their lives to the demands of this call in Christ Jesus. We have to be open to change in our personal lives. Young people especially need to be careful not to pressurize their parents into doing things which would spell compromise. The house of God cannot be a place of mixture. We need to know what we have been called into.

The book of Revelation shows us that after the days of Antipas who was an uncompromising leader, the people holding responsibility failed to discern the condition of the church. The church at Pergamos had been inundated with the things of the world but the leaders were not able to step in and correct the malady. When the sheep were divided by people who sought after the philosophies of the world, the leaders were left watching helplessly. Beloved, this call will cost us everything.

I would like to specially warn young brothers and sisters of the second generation, whose parents know the Lord and who have heard this truth and are walking in it. If these young ones want to walk in the ways of their parents, they need to be prepared to pay a price. If they were privileged to hear the counsel of God and the voice of the prophets during their childhood and in their teens, they need to now demonstrate it through their lives. Their lives must not stand in contradiction to whatever they have heard in the House of God. And this is the sorrow of His love! Countless children have not had the privilege they have had. Therefore, they need to go out of their way to establish and prove this by the kind of lives they live and the testimony they hold. **They need to realize the demands of this call upon their lives.** They could have wasted their lives elsewhere, but God in His mercy had something better for them. When Jeremiah was yet in his youth, he opened his life to the Lord; the same goes for Samuel the prophet. **This call would place you in a path that is unpopular; it will bring you no fame or riches; it is not a path where you will get a great name; and few will be your**

companions, but it is a path that will please the Lord. So there is a need for each one of you to be open to the voice of God in this crucial time. Let this register deeply within every young person. **You need to be steadfast in taking up this call to bear an unwelcome testimony, to plow alone and to move on, notwithstanding the times in which you live.**

THE PREPARATION OF THE SORROWFUL

Jer 1:5 "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

These are words that would strengthen and encourage anyone who would like to enter the ministry. Though we may not be aware of the depths of this Word, but it will certainly inspire anyone who is called to identify with God's sorrow and grief. The word to Jeremiah was that **the Lord had chosen him before he had even seen the light of this world.** Before God formed him in the belly He knew him. The word of God

that constituted Jeremiah's very ordination to the office of a prophet also revealed his fore-ordination to that post of high honour!

Today, ministers want to demonstrate their power and show themselves to be great in the eyes of countless number of people. But here was a man who was drawn to share the sorrow of God's heart. So in this verse, we read of his fore-ordination and also his ordination into this call. The divine disclosure in verse 5 spoke of a preparation for the tasks that were to engage his strength; a preparation that stretched back into the mysterious past. It bore the seal of eternity right at the starting point and also included gifts of spiritual consecration which preceded the discipline of his conscious experience. His work was to be unusually extensive in its activities and for the most part intensely painful in character. His commission was 'to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and plant'. The closing terms, to build and to plant, indicate a generative purpose but the greater part of his work was to be of a destructive nature. Both these ends were, of course, to be achieved by Jeremiah as the instrument of the

resistless energies of the Lord!

Many times God's people are content to be pleased about God's call upon their lives. It often happens that after a prophecy, believers are keen to seek the fulfillment of that prophecy. They want the prophecy to be fulfilled immediately. However, they do not realize the cost involved and the preparation that has yet to take place in their lives to fulfill the prophecy.

Jer 1:6. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

Jer 1:7. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

God's call upon our lives, as individuals, as families, or as the family of God, always comes with a price tag. **We must not forget that the call of God comes to us, irrespective of our age, with a price tag and a preparatory work.** Before we can come into the things of God our lives need to be subjected to a work of preparation, on

which there comes a seal of eternity. This is not like the seal of some bible college or Christian institution. There are many who can provide a human seal of acceptance, but there has to be a divine seal of eternity upon our lives before God is able to use us. This is a part of the calling in Christ Jesus. We can see that divine seal over Jeremiah's life and ministry. **There is a preparation under the hand of God that goes beyond the preparations of man for ministry.**

A second outstanding fact in connection with Jeremiah's call is his own shrinking away from the tasks he faced. "Ah, Lord God!" he cried, "behold I cannot speak: for I am a child" (1:6). He was, of course, not a child in the literal sense, for he would have been over twenty; **but he felt he was like a child in knowledge and experience; he was especially apprehensive of being unfit to hold a prophetic office on the grounds of a conscious lack of the gift of utterances.** This is a striking illustration of the mysterious working of the sovereign will of God. In His wisdom He chose as 'a prophet unto the nations', a man apparently unfit by temperament and aptitude for that

tremendous task.

A third feature of vital significance in Jeremiah's call was the special equipment which he received for his life work. This equipment was symbolized by the touch of the Divine hand on his mouth, an action which was accompanied by the explanatory assurance, 'Behold I have put my words in thy mouth...' (2:9).

Jeremiah's equipment also included a message from the Lord which was particularly adapted to his need. It consisted, first of all, of a word of command in answer to his protestation of unfitness (1:7). **The twice repeated 'Thou shalt', of this solemn charge - 'Thou shalt go', and 'Thou shalt speak' - swept aside the young prophet's objections, and made it plain to him that he must subject himself unreservedly to the authority of his Divine Master, with respect alike to the sphere of his labour and to the character of his message.** But the word of command was followed by a word of gracious encouragement: 'Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee, to deliver thee.' **Hostile faces there certainly would be in**

plenty - brows lowered in resentment, eyes flashing in hatred, and lips curled in scorn or clamorous in denunciation; but here was a promise of the Lord's own presence throughout all the days, and in that fact there lay for Jeremiah a guarantee of strength and protection amid all the difficulties and dangers of his future ministry. Saints, the prophet certainly needed a full share of courage, for few men have ever been confronted with a more formidable task.

Jeremiah realized the depths and the intensity of things he was being led into, the intensely painful things that he would have to undergo and the tremendous strength he would need. This caused him to shy away and withdraw from the seemingly difficult and trying ministry. And see what the Lord says to him,

Jer 1:10. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

The Lord set Jeremiah above the nations.

Yet he did not set out to go to the nations saying, "God has spoken a prophecy over me". What a contrast to the things we see today! The availability of ready money and abundance of human ego drives many a preacher to third world countries to promote their ministry. It is neither an anointing of the Spirit nor a true burden for the testimony of the Lord that takes them to these places. "Taking the truth to the nations" is the present trend set in many Christian circles. What confusion this has led to! Every man is blowing his own trumpet! Many of these men are not even called by the Lord, nor sent of the Lord. Many of them do not even fulfill the qualifications necessary according Paul's letter to Timothy.

The Lord did not send Jeremiah as a prince to rule or dictate to the people, but the Lord sent him as a prophet to bring His powerful word of warning and judgment to the people. The Lord showed him by the Spirit what lay ahead in terms of his life and his ministry. Similarly, the Lord told the apostle Paul, "I will cause you to stand before the king. I will make you a witness and a testimony before nations and kings." **And when Paul stood**

before the Emperor, he laid down his life to the will of the Lord. Today, ministers want to share the gospel with presidents, prime ministers and political leaders while nurturing a yearning to receive name, fame and glory for themselves. They would never go anywhere near them had they to first pay a price to meet them! We are truly living in terrible times, for the lives of the ministers of God's Word today are far from what they were in Paul's time. The Lord had a ministry for Paul but when he was brought before the Emperor he gave his very life. **No one would witness Christ to presidents and prime ministers if they knew they would never return alive!** The zeal we find today amongst ministers stems mostly from the self and the flesh.

Jeremiah knew that his ministry would be intensely painful. He was called to root out, to pull down and to destroy and to throw down—but also to build and to plant. Today, everybody expects their ministry to take-off smoothly, without a hitch. They want to enlarge their ministry in a short span of six months. They could begin with a small group of twenty people, but within six months they

would like to show that their ministry has expanded to a thousand! **In other words, every ministry is eager to build and to plant, but nobody wants to first root out, pull down and to destroy.** Remember, something worthwhile can only be built after there has been a tearing down. But who is willing to accept such a ministry? To root out, to pull down and to destroy is an unpopular way! **It is only after things have been pulled-down and rooted-out that something after the mind of God can be built!** It is easy to build a ministry on the lines of man's designs for it will not attract any opposition, reproach or rejection. Saints, many things are happening in Christendom, but God is looking for a body in the earth, a people who will be a prophetic voice in this age.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF JEREMIAH'S TIMES

If we pay attention to the times in which Jeremiah fulfilled his ministry, it will help us to fully understand the difficulties involved in a ministry of his kind. We will also recognize some similarities to our times; this

will help us to give ourselves more specifically to be a 'voice' for the Lord. We must realize that we are living in times that are very similar to the times of Jeremiah. An appreciation of this will help us to be His voice in the earth in the present time. Here are some special features that existed in the time of Jeremiah; there are many similarities to the conditions that prevail today; therefore, this will assist us in coming under the burden of the Lord for our times.

1. It was a time of spiritual decline or declension. There was a lowering of true spiritual standards and spiritual values. There was a loss of inner and heavenly meaning of Divine things. This is what displeased the Lord. May we hear and discern the sorrow of God's heart; may we hear the cry of the prophets today! How true this is of our times. The spiritual standards and values today are the lowest in all past centuries. The inner and heavenly meaning of Divine things is lost.

2. It was a time of religious formalism. In Jeremiah's time everything had become mere religion with externals,

forms and techniques; there was only a form of godliness. Paul says that one of the signs of the last days where there are forms and techniques, but without the inner realities. The Scriptures had been lost, but a tradition of sorts was still in place! The Scriptures were quoted but their true meanings were lost. Things had become traditional and had lost their original and primal meaning. Service and worship had become a form; the reality was missing. In our country, an Indian version of worship has taken root in some Pentecostal assemblies. I happened to see a CD that would be nauseating to any spiritual person. To see believers taking part in worship that is mingled with the 'Kathakali' and 'Bharatanatyam' dances grieves the heart. But the reality is that many believers are becoming a part of such a system where the inner meaning of worship has been totally lost. Jesus said "*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" (John 4:23-24). Yes, we have a form of worship today that appears to be very impressive but the worship is at best

superficial in nature. Good music and meaningful scripts are used, but the heart of worship seems amiss. What is lost is an inner link to the heart of God. The reason for this is that many of them lack a life of personal devotion to the Lord in their daily life. Many are insensitive to the Holy Spirit in a gathering. They worship God but it turns out to be something formal and outward because they are not adequately sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Every worshipper has a responsibility to be sensitive to the Spirit of God for everyone knows inwardly when his or her worship moves from realism to something that is formal.

Outward worship was rampant in the days of Jeremiah. People came to the house of the Lord and said, "This is the temple of the Lord; this is the temple of the Lord." **The more they said this, the more spiritual they felt. The vital application of the word and its inner conviction were lost.** They thought they had become more spiritual because they gave themselves to ritualistic forms of worship. But the Lord said that He would burn down the House of God because

His people were worshipping God with hearts that were insensitive and deceptive. Unfortunately, by and large, worship is no different these days. **People of God have become so 'religious' that the vital application of spiritual things to their lives has been totally lost. This is a very dangerous state to be in!**

So we see that in Jeremiah's days, religion went into one pocket and the vital application to life went through a hole in the other! The Lord said: "*They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water.*" **Human substitutes for the Lord and His principles; are in plenty today, but they are broken and cannot hold water for long!** We see all kinds of modern 'cisterns', but they do not hold any 'life'; they are not able to retain any life! It is sad that nothing really remains as far as life and eternity are concerned. All that begins with much pomp and show and with much human fervor cannot bring life that will endure. Everything that man brings forth leaks out in a matter of time, even before the 'man of the hour' leaves town! Why? Let us ask ourselves

this question and answer it honestly. It is because they have forsaken the Fountain! God is substituted by cleverly fabricated methods of men. The voice of Jeremiah is very true of our times.

3. It was a time of moral degradation.

The moral standards of God's people in Jeremiah's time had gone into a perfect landslide. **The vehemence of the hatred demonstrated against the Prophet was largely due to the high standard of his spiritual and moral purity. The degree of their vehemence shows how low the nation had stooped in terms of their moral degeneration.** Jeremiah warned them, but the people were angry with the Prophet. Not only did he tell them about their moral decay, but he demonstrated the degradation of their moral standards by the display of his own pure life. This angered them all the more. We too are living in such times. There is a terrible downward trend in the moral standards of the church. Look at the condition of so called Christian Nations and notice their moral state! Divorce rates are much higher in these countries. Even among church leaders divorce is widely accepted and quite

common. Morally, what is not even happening among gentiles is happening among the leading Christian figures and spiritual people. Moral degradation has also affected and spread into the churches in India. Church leaders have accepted these lower moral standards to justify their own lust and flesh. Though many **of them are not even qualified to be leaders as per God's Word**, they seek to justify their actions by having **large congregations**. Have you noticed how the ways of the world are entering into the sphere of Christian marriage? Saints, who will stand in this hour of moral degradation?

Young brothers and sisters, let me caution you to be careful not to embrace the principles of this world in the matter of marriage. Keep your heart open to the Lord and His word. Paul's counsel to Timothy and to those who have entered the ministry is to flee from youthful lusts. **But the unfortunate thing is that many young people are looking for job opportunities in the very places from where they need to flee!** Saints, the choices open to believers are few and far between in this world. **Many who are living in compromise have fallen over**

the cliff of immorality. Where is the preacher of righteousness such as Noah of old? We need such men today. When young people come with fond ideas of having jobs in places that are circumspect and seek the prayers of elders, we need men who can counsel them to flee from such places. But instead, we have leaders to bless them and pray for their success! What a compromise! Where is the leader who will openly deny them prayer support, correct them and tell them to give up any thought of working in places where they could easily lose their moral character and values? It is sad that many **leaders and even parents are numb towards these crucial moral issues. Bigger pay packets and perks have blinded the eyes and hardened the lives of many believers!** Working environments have become so polluted that one can literally smell the prevailing moral decay. Truly, morally speaking things are more than terrible! How careful God's remnant ought to be in this hour. We are living in times that are far worse than the times of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Let us, therefore, remember the call that

is upon our lives in this hour. The values of the world must never be appropriated by us. **Jeremiah the prophet maintained the highest standard of personal morality and spirituality.** The calling of the church is no different. But what we see all around is that the church has compromised with the world. God has a remnant and that is what we see in Jeremiah. When it comes to moral life, even those who hold to the teaching and doctrine of God's remnant are found to be living in compromise. Divorce and remarriage has become a rampant infection. **But God's true remnant must maintain a high moral and spiritual standard in these last days, just as Jeremiah of old did. Though the whole nation of Israel had declined morally and spiritually, one man was in echelon with the voice of God.** One man represented the presence of God when there was decay and rot all around. Let us not say that everybody is doing it, that they are also believers. If you know your calling, you need to maintain the testimony of Jesus Christ. We are living in times of such moral decline among God's people that we need to realize the magnitude of our high calling at this time in particular. This is a crucial time in the history of God's people.

4. **It was a time of commercial obsession.** The criterion of success in Jeremiah's time was measured by material and commercial gain. Here, a satanic twist and distortion had taken place. Whereas material prosperity and advancement were a mark of the blessing of God as a token of Divine approval of the faithfulness of God to His covenant and Word in that old dispensation, **in Jeremiah's time gain had become divorced from holy living.** Thus, the world and its business became the enemy of spiritual life, and weakened it, sapped it and finally shattered it. The cunning lie of the great deceiver was that if you had means, money, possessions, etc., you could serve God better with it. But the prophets said "No, never!" God said, "Away with it; I will take no sheep from your flock nor ox from your stall. Your gold and silver are polluted."

Today also, the need for outward success in ministry is over-taking God's people, especially the leaders. Success has become a dominating feature of ministry; profit-making and commercial gain has taken the front bench. Religious channels in TV provide ample evidence of the commercial obsession

that is binding God's people. **Their programmes reflect a satanic twist and distortion that many are unable to discern. Many preachers and leaders talk about prosperity, materialism, and wealth to the exclusion of other important spiritual matters.** It is no more Christ-likeness and His nature that makes this sin-sick world turn to the living God!

On TV, I heard a preacher sermonize, "If you are not rich, God will not be glorified; you would not glorify your God!" Such people insist that material prosperity and material advancement is a sign of God's blessing upon our lives. **Satan has convinced them that prosperity and success is a token of God's approval of our lives.** Therefore, their successes and gains have turned people away from the call to follow the living Lord. The apostle Paul warns the New Testament believers about this very thing. That which they call success has turned them away from desiring to be near the Lord. In their love for material success, many preachers have lost their anointing. **The overriding need for success has sapped the spiritual growth of many**

people. The cunning lies of Satan have made achievement the most important criteria in ministry; the devils counsel is that possessions, resources and money enable one to serve God better! Jeremiah, the prophet of God refuted this in his time. He said that God could not accept such an emphasis upon material possessions and he strongly opposed any and every move of the kings, princes and rulers to make success an important factor for kingdom prosperity. He emphasized that God would never give greater weight to human possessions. Saints of God, materialism is taking hold of God's people today. Everyone, from preacher to prophet, from one end to another, is given to covetousness. The apostle Paul says "*Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself*" (1 Tim 6:5).

The Amplified New Testament says, "*who imagine that godliness {or} righteousness is a source of profit [a moneymaking business, a means of livelihood]. {From such withdraw.}* **Even the things of the Lord have become a means to make money and a means of**

increasing prosperity today. Materialism has become the passion of the house of Israel! It is an obsession in the hearts of the people of God today. They are being robbed of the true treasures of God and are being fed on false treasures of materialism, prosperity and wealth. "Big business" and commercial engrossment can become a fascination, an obsession, and the thief of spiritual increase.

5. It was a time for the judgments of God and of pending disaster. There were ominous signs all around. Nations were warring and restless. One after another kingdoms were falling. New powers rose on the ashes of the old. The air was full of threats. The only resort to survival was greater fierceness and violence. Disaster was no stranger to consciousness. No one had any sense of security or assurance of an indefinite tenure of life. This condition, especially so in Jerusalem, brought a reaction that led to the bringing in of a false and bolstered-up "courage", foolhardiness and presumptuousness. **Thus Jeremiah, who kept the pending judgment in view, was charged with being a traitor and thrown into a dungeon to silence him. His**

warnings were met with faces harder than a rock (2:23, 35; 7:28). Guilt was repudiated, and correction rejected.

Nations were waging wars against one another. It was a time of restlessness among the nations. Violence marked the day. No one had a sense of clarity in the days of Jeremiah. None had an assurance of life. **Today there is assurance because there is insurance, but there is no sense of true security.** The judgments of God were waiting to come upon Jerusalem. People were living presumptuously. It is the same today. The more Jeremiah spoke of the judgments of God, the more they spoke against him. They threw him into a dungeon so that he may stop speaking, but his voice could not be quenched. He was the convicting voice of God of his times: he was destined to be His voice. Such voices cannot be stopped. **The more he warned them the more they hardened their hearts towards God. They refused to accept their guilt; correction was rejected; they refused to even hear him.** The same history is repeated today. People do not accept their mistakes and corrections are rejected.

Everyone wants to justify their ways and their wrongdoings. No one wants to hear the voice of warning and correction.

Beloved, this calling wherewith we have been called is a serious one. If you believe that you are a part of the remnant of God in the earth for this time, then you need to give yourself to walk this lonely way. Those who feel that this is God's call upon their lives must give themselves to His prophetic voice. Let us be prepared to be a 'voice' in this hour. The cost and the sacrifice that has been made in the past by each one of us provides no guarantee that we shall not compromise today. **God is reaching into a backslidden and compromising church to find a remnant for Himself—a remnant that will take up the unpopular way and plough the lonely furrow, standing against every adverse current to bear the unwelcome testimony of the Lord in these crucial days.**

Dearly beloved, are you prepared and willing to be a part of such a remnant in this hour of spiritual decline and apostasy?



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