

JEREMIAH & THE OLD PATHS

THUS SAYS THE LORD: *"Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it' (Jer. 6:16).*

What are some of the "old paths"?

The Old Path of Prayer

The prophet Jeremiah was a man of earnest prayer. The "weeping prophet" was his nick-name. Like our Lord Jesus, he was a man acquainted with sorrow and grief. He felt the constant burden of the nation's sin.

Judah had become proud, disobedient and rebellious towards God. The prophets, the priests and the rulers were dealing falsely. The nation had become a selfish and greedy people, trusting in materialism (Jer. 48:7). They were shameless and unapologetic in all their sinful attitudes (Jer. 6:15, 16). Jeremiah told the people they were on the wrong path. But they would not listen. In spite of it all, he persistently prayed for them.

Jeremiah prayed fervently

Jeremiah 14:7-9 –O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, Do it for your name's sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You. O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, why should You be like a stranger in the land, And like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should You be like a man astonished, like a mighty one who cannot save? Yet You, O Lord, are in our midst, and we are called by Your name; do not leave us!

Lam.2:11—My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city.

Someone aptly said, *"It was only through prayer that Jeremiah could obtain the strength to face the fire of the people's anger and the ice of their rejection."*

Unless Jeremiah had worked to sustain his relationship with God through prayer, he would never have persevered.

Jeremiah 33:3—"Call unto Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

The Old Path of Preaching

We are commanded in 2 Timothy 4:2: *“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”*

How did Jeremiah preach?

Jeremiah preached faithfully. We must preach faithfully. The pure Word of God must be sown in the hearts of men, not some adulterated or perverted word. When the pure Word of God is planted in the heart of man, it will produce true Christians—wheat for the granary.

On the other hand, when the Word of God is perverted, manipulated, and changed it produces tares—tares which end up in the fire.

It has been said, *“The twisting, perverting, warping and changing of God’s Word in the last 2000 years has resulted in hundreds of different flavours of Christianity.”* How true and how tragic!

Jeremiah possessed great endurance in his ministry of 40 long years of solid faithful preaching. He never gave up, even though he may have felt like. At times he would have preferred not to preach, but when the power of the Spirit of God came upon him, he went out and spoke for God mightily.

“When I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name.....His Word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary of holding it in; I could not” (Jer. 20:9).

God’s Word would burn in him. Oh, that it would burn in us!

Jeremiah, even in the face of resistance and indifference, demonstrated great daring in standing up for the truth. Let us not forget, there were great demands and sacrifices required of him in his life. God prohibited Jeremiah from marrying. God told him to buy land that he would never be able to use. Jeremiah was put in prison, and thrown into a muddy, dark well. He was rejected by his friends, neighbours, family, priests, prophets, and kings. He was attacked on all sides, but he was unyielding as an *“iron pillar and a bronze wall”* (Jer.1:18), when it came to preaching the truth.

Jeremiah preached fearlessly. We must also preach fearlessly. The fear of man traps us. In order to strengthen Jeremiah’s heart lest he fear men, God promised him His mighty presence and delivering power. Read Jer.1:8.

As someone has said, “God had enrolled Jeremiah in the University of Hard Knocks at Jerusalem.” He received his B.A. degree from God Almighty: “B-e not A-fraid!”

In Jeremiah’s day, as in ours, many were seeking preachers who would tickle their ears and tell them that all is well. “Peace, peace,” the false prophets of the day cried out; where there was no peace. God told them that they were dressing the wound of his people as though it were not serious. Preachers are dressing wounds today, just like then. Their preaching isn’t curative. It doesn’t save. It doesn’t heal. It doesn’t bless. And it doesn’t honour God.

Soft preaching makes hard hearts; hard preaching generally makes soft hearts.

The apostle Paul warns us of such men in II Timothy 4:3: “*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*”

Jeremiah was not influenced by popular consensus or opinion. Jeremiah told the people what they needed to hear even though they did not want to hear it. How hard it must have been for Jeremiah to keep on preaching, because from the get go he was told that the people would not listen!

Anointed, powerful, faithful and fearless preaching rescues people from Hell. How you preach is just as important as what you preach. Unction in the pulpit produces action in the pews. Oh, God let your preachers function with unction!

What was Jeremiah’s word like?

Jeremiah 23:29... “*Is not my Word like fire*” declares the LORD, “*and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?*”

Jeremiah’s word was like a burning fire. People did not like it, but sinful human nature was made to feel its heat and purifying effect. When Jeremiah spoke, in the name of the Lord, every word seemed to bring deep, burning conviction to his hearers.

Jeremiah’s word was like a hammer. A hammer is an instrument used to break rocks, and beat stones to pieces. Jeremiah’s message did not comfort the ungodly, but it broke their stony hearts, for the prophet was seeking, if possible, to separate them from their sin.

The church is in urgent need of fearless preaching, like that of Jeremiah, which rebukes sin and boldly declares the truth regardless of the outcome.

The Old Path of Perseverance

Jeremiah was altogether human. At times he felt like running away, and giving up on everyone and everything. Many of us have felt that way too, especially those of us who are in ministry. Read Jeremiah 9.2.

Why did Jeremiah want to flee?

His task wasn't an easy one, he was charged by God to preach their judgment and doom. He was hated for it. We must realize that Jeremiah was tender-hearted and extremely sensitive. He was a kind and gentle soul, but his kinsmen were adulterers, traitors, slanders and forsakers of God.

It's normal to want to flee. Jeremiah wanted to get away from the persecution from such evil men. He was ridiculed and mocked constantly. What burden that must have been? No one would listen to him. He wanted to leave because his ministry seemed a total failure.

No man ever had a more fruitless ministry in his own day than Jeremiah. What was the hardest thing to accept was the fact that God's wrath was about to fall on them—the cruel Babylonians were on their way—and that meant the loss and utter ruin of the people he loved.

Did Jeremiah leave? No. Why did he stay?

He remained steadfast from a sense a duty. He felt he had to stay the course. He felt the voice of duty. The mighty cords of conviction bound him. He was convinced, in spite of the fact that his message was being rejected, that acceptance was his people's only hope. His message not only announced severe judgment, but also offered the nation the hope of salvation. There was the promise of a new covenant.

Jeremiah was also held by the cords of love. Love for his God and love for his fellow Jews, even though they pained and grieved and angered him. In spite of all their sins he loved them.

Jeremiah 10:19: *Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is severe. But I say, "Truly this is an infirmity, and I must bear it."* Jeremiah's love would bear all things.

"He did not merely speak *for* God; he felt *with* Him: and he did not merely speak to the people; he felt *with them.*" Jeremiah reminds all God-ordained preachers that speaking boldly on behalf of God and grieving brokenly on behalf of the people are two parts of the same work.

Jeremiah persevered because of God's might power at work in him. God had promised from the very beginning that He would be with him. *They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you," says the Lord, "to deliver you"* Jer. 1:19.

Jeremiah lived and died without any success. Judah would not repent, therefore God brought down the hammer of destruction on them. Nebuchadnezzar came with his armies and devastated the land. Some were killed by the sword; others were taken as captives to Babylon.

Sadly, Israel had refused to listen to Jeremiah's message and warnings. They said "*We will not walk in the old paths.*" So, the result of their choice was chastisement and destruction.

There is a high price to pay for refusing to walk in the "old paths" of God—the old paths of contriteness before Him in prayer, taking His word seriously and persevering with Him to the end. Read Jer. 6:19.

The last handful of Jews left in the land fled to Egypt against Jeremiah's word. They carried the aged, broken-hearted prophet with them against his will. He spent the rest of his tearful days there until he died. Tradition tells us he was stoned to death by his exasperated fellow Hebrews.

The new paths are delusive and destructive. They are man's miserable substitute for God's "old paths of blessing."

Indebtedness and gratitude to Clovis Gillham Chappell (1882-1972) for the many precious insights from his sermon: Jeremiah—The Lure of the Wilderness.