

Jeremiah – God’s Humble, Faithful Prophet

Dub McClish

Introduction

To learn the way God measures preachers and preaching we need to return repeatedly to the faithful prophets as our models. There is no nobler model than Jeremiah in the way he responded to his commission from God. Surely, it is not too much to say that no mere man ever surpassed his humility before God and men. His absolute faithfulness in discharging his God-given task under the most severe duress, opposition, and suffering is legendary. Moreover, these two marvelous traits are related as cause to effect; they exemplify what God still seeks in His spokesmen.

Jeremiah’s Humility

The call of God to Jeremiah must have inspired great awe in him:

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

At first Jeremiah appears to be overwhelmed with the task God has laid upon him:

“Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child” (v. 6). He seems to be both alarmed and amazed that God would call such a one as himself for the awful work of being His mouthpiece to the nations. He remonstrates that he is not skilled as a speaker, reminiscent of Moses’ great reserve and similar excuse when God called him (Exo. 3:10–4:12).

Jeremiah described himself as but “a child.” He may refer to his youthfulness, but he also may mean that, compared to the task, the abilities, and the challenges the work would require, he saw himself as unqualified as a child. He seems to be not so much trying to avoid doing what God commanded, as wondering aloud how, knowing his own limitations, he would ever be able to accomplish it. Rather than criticizing Jeremiah’s reticence, I admire his humility and modesty.

There is hardly any trait that so becomes the personality as humility, and hardly any that so mars all other qualities as that of pride. This observation seems somehow magnified regarding those who preach. Self-centered, ego-maniacal men who preach out of envy and strife (Phi. 1:15) have (unfortunately) not disappeared. Pride is a temptation of special severity to preachers. They are constantly in the spotlight; people often consult them, ask them questions,

seek their counsel, and publicly praise them. A preacher can begin to believe all those nice things people write or say about him. (Of course, his wife and his elders may help keep him in touch with reality.)

Few things are more disgusting to right-thinking people than a preacher who is puffed up with his own ability, education, influence, and/or importance. I am convinced that pride has been a major cause of abandoning the Truth and swallowing the liberal slop of theological pluralism by many. I am also convinced that some have adopted and continue to propagate strange, quirky heresies to feed a bloated ego.

Some among us who have attained advanced degrees (many of whom are on the faculties of “our” schools) look down their “ivory tower” noses at the “unscholarly” fellows who have no more sense than to study and preach the Bible. These self-proclaimed “scholars” are among the leaders in the determined effort to force the church of our Lord into a denominational mold. In their pride they cannot tolerate their denominational academic fellows thinking of them as “narrow” in their concepts of fellowship, the conditions of pardon, worship, and like subjects.

Not that there is virtue in ignorance – those who are not so formally educated can also succumb to pride (indeed, some seem to be proud of their ignorance). Moreover, we should all appreciate the good men who have attained high levels of learning and who have remained faithful and humble servants of God. However, the ditches along the highway of Truth are littered with the rotting spiritual carcasses of those who have gone off to big-name seminaries and universities and have “outgrown” and “advanced beyond” Biblical Truth. Pride has been their downfall.

But one does not have to be a doctrinal fruitcake, a theological liberal, or someone educated beyond his intelligence to fall prey to pride. Those who otherwise are sticklers for the Truth can also succumb to this deadly sin. It seems that some are not content to let “cream rise to the top” – they want to give it a boost by self-promotion. Many seem to have forgotten Solomon’s sage words: “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (Pro. 27:2). Some seem driven by youthful ambition to openly seek immediate position and prominence that rightly come only through decades of faithful, laborious, and difficult work.

A few years ago, a preacher attending a lectureship reportedly asked how one went about getting an invitation to speak on such a program, for he would surely like to do so. Such reminds me somewhat of a twelve-year old fledgling “song leader” wanting to lead “The New Song” or of a new convert who comes up out of the water wanting to begin a study of Revelation.

Though they may not have a string of degrees after their names or be the greatest orators, those who preach God’s Truth in humility and at great sacrifice (whether they are ever invited to speak on a lectureship) are nonetheless, like Jeremiah, great in the eyes of God. We all need to remember the Lord’s warning/promise: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mat. 23:12). Jeremiah typified the latter.

The proud man asks, when charged with great responsibility: “I thought you would never call.” The humble servant, as Jeremiah, asks: “How can one of such mean ability possibly be equal to the task?” No suit of clothes ever looked better on a Gospel preacher than the suit of humility. Let us all cultivate the beautiful and commendable trait Paul advocated:

For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

An unknown poet observed:

How ready is the man to go,
Whom God hath never sent!
How timorous, diffident, and slow,
God’s chosen instrument!

Jeremiah’s Faithfulness

When God told Jeremiah what to do, no excuse was sufficient to avoid the task:

But Jehovah said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak” (Jer. 1:7).

God does not severely rebuke the fledgling prophet, which may indicate that God understood that Jeremiah’s hesitancy arose not from faithlessness, but from meekness, modesty, and understandable fear, given the task set before him.

Part of Jeremiah’s reluctance may have sprung from his anticipation of the shameful treatment one would receive who spoke what Judah and the nations needed to hear. He had

every reason thus to be, even before his specific message was given him. God reassured him: “Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith Jehovah” (v. 8). It was not for Jeremiah to question his qualifications or his ability to stand before great men with a message they would not appreciate; it was his place to obey and let God take care of the details, which He promised to do.

The essence of God’s commission to all His preachers – whether inspired or uninspired – is found in His words to Jeremiah: “Whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak” (v. 7). God’s preachers will speak only and all that God commands (authorizes) them to speak. If they do not, they are not God’s spokesmen, whatever their claim. Most preachers have never been content very long to speak the message of God, even as the people have not long been willing to hear it.

While God sent Jeremiah “unto the nations,” He primarily sent him in one last desperate effort to bring Judah and Jerusalem to repentance. His message was repent or perish (Luke 13:3). God described Judah’s apostasy as twofold: “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). In a nutshell, they had abandoned God in favor of senseless idols, and, as must follow, they degenerated into gross immorality.

Except for Josiah, in whose reign Jeremiah began his work (1:1–2), the corruption started with the king and flowed down to the people through priest and prophet: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so...” (Jer. 5:31). Jeremiah had to attack this corruption almost single-handedly, plead for repentance, and warn of certain judgment. In return, he suffered public ridicule, cursing, being fastened in stocks, beating and imprisonment, death threats, charges of treason, and being cast into a miry dungeon. Through it all, he faithfully spoke God’s message. The leaders and the people had hearts of stone, and in refusing to repent, sealed their own doom. Jeremiah exemplifies the faithfulness to which all of God’s Truth-loving preachers must aspire.

We presently see much of the spiritual corruption among the people of God that existed in Jeremiah’s time. Apostasy is evident on every hand. God’s spiritual Israel is cursed with an abundance of prophets who prophesy falsely and with multitudes of stupefied pew-sitters who “love to have it so” (Jer. 5:31; cf. 27:15; 29:9). The “Hananiahs” have proliferated in spiritual Zion (Jer. 28:1–17). What began as a whisper a few decades ago from a few radicals has now grown into a great shout from many men of vast influence. Some of them are on the boards, in

the administrations, and on the faculties of once-faithful schools. They have already poisoned the hearts of generations of young people entrusted to them by overly trusting, naïve, Pollyanna parents.

Dangerous, misguided false prophets occupy editorial chairs and staffs of such papers as *Integrity*, *New Wineskins*, and *The Christian Chronicle*. Many such religious seditionists dominate elderships and occupy pulpits in some of the largest congregations. One of the greatest tragedies that those of us who have traveled overseas have seen is the wicked work some of these unscrupulous zealots have done in exporting their heresies to faraway places with strange-sounding names. I have seen first-hand the effects of their evil deeds in once-faithful churches in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, The Philippines, Jamaica, Russia, and Europe.

Even now, when God's faithful ones raise the cry of alarm, such folk cannot be moved. As Jeremiah asked his people concerning the tragedy that had befallen old Jerusalem, we ask our brethren who are still nonchalant and unconcerned: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" (Lam. 1:12). Those in today's permissive and irrational climate who dare to speak what God commands are not going to win any popularity contests, even as Jeremiah did not. They are going to be mistreated (as Jeremiah was) by the very ones who should be upholding their hands, helping, and encouraging them. However, even when sin and error have temporarily triumphed, like old Jeremiah, true servants of God will not compromise the message of God to avoid persecution.

Conclusion

I urge those who preach the Gospel to be ever on guard against vain glory ("pride," KJV), one of the "big three" avenues of temptation:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (1 John 2:16).

I exhort those who preach – whether young or old – in this day of compromise and apostasy, to be like Jeremiah of old in fulfilling God's charge to us: "Whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak." This done, whatever wicked men and women in or out of the church may do to us, we will eventually triumph through Christ.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared in the November 2002 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

Attribution: From *thescripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.