

# **Jeremiah, Symbol Of Perseverence**

[Delivered to the Minnesota District Teachers Conference, LCMS : Sauk Rapids, Minn. : October 23, 1958]

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## **Introduction**

The times in which Jeremiah preached the Word as a prophet of the Lord were very much like the times in which we live. It was a period of great uncertainty and danger in political affairs. He saw the decay and downfall of the great world empire of the Assyrians, just as we have seen the British Empire tumble from the heights of its greatness. He saw the two great world powers struggling for supremacy in the world, the new kingdom of Babylon and the revived dynasty of Egypt, just as we see Russia and the United States competing for the supreme position of final arbiter in world affairs.

And like our own times, the period of Jeremiah's ministry was one of great religious revival. Shortly after he began his ministry, King Josiah carried out the great reform by which the idolatry that had been introduced during the reign of Manasseh was once more suppressed. The Land was full of prophets preaching what they called the Word of the Lord, and both prophets and priests enjoyed the support and acclaim of the people. There was no animosity directed against organized religion, just as in our day the visible church in our country basks in the favor of the general public.

But Jeremiah did not share in this general good will. Instead, he was hated and persecuted, reviled and imprisoned for his preaching. And yet, in spite of all the sorrow and suffering that came to him as a direct result of his faithfulness to the Lord and his loyalty to the truth of God's word, he continued for almost a half century in the devoted service to the spiritual welfare of his people, preaching the truth in season and out of season, teaching men what they needed to know if they were to find salvation and rest for their souls. In his perseverance and faithfulness we can find an example that we would do well to follow and that we need in these times that in so many ways resemble the days in which he lived and labored.

## **THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE DURING THE LIFETIME OF JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah was called into the prophetic office in the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah was the last good king to sit on the throne of the Southern kingdom. In the twelfth year of his reign (or 629 BC), he inaugurated a far-reaching reform in religion, just as his great-grandfather Hezekiah had done about a hundred years earlier. This reform was therefore just beginning when Jeremiah began his ministry. In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (623 BC), he reopened and repaired the temple and rededicated it to the worship of Jehovah. But thirteen years later, when he was only 39 years old, Josiah was slain in a battle with the forces of Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo, and we are told in the book of Chronicles that "Jeremiah lamented for Josiah" (2 Ch 35:25). Although Jeremiah preached for twenty years of the reign of Josiah, very little of the book of Jeremiah dates from this period of his life.

The death of Josiah marked the beginning of the end for the southern kingdom, although Jerusalem was to stand as the capital of Judah for twenty-two more years. The people made Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, but Pharaoh Necho took him captive after he had ruled for only three months. In his place, Pharaoh installed his older brother, Jehoiakim, as ruler. Jehoiakim was a cruel and wicked man and many of the messages recorded in the book of Jeremiah are dated to his reign. During the eleven years of the rule of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was actively persecuted and his life was in constant danger. During his reign too the kingdom of Judah came under the control of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who, in the third year of Jehoiakim (606 BC), led the first Jews into captivity in Babylon (Dn 1:1).

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, in 598 BC. He ruled only three months and ten days, for Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem and this time he led a larger number of Jews into captivity.

The leading members of the nobility, the outstanding military men, and the skilled laborers in Judah, 10,000 in all, were taken away to hinder any possibility of revolt, and Zedekiah the third son of Josiah, was made king.

While Zedekiah was not as actively wicked as his brother, he was a weakling. He did not persecute Jeremiah as vigorously as did Jehoiakim, and he even at times asked Jeremiah for advice that he never followed, but he permitted others to persecute the prophet and he is condemned in Scripture as a king who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. His example is a constant warning to those who stand idly by while the prophets of the Lord who speak the truth are reviled and slandered and persecuted. Contrary to the advice of Jeremiah, Zedekiah permitted himself to be maneuvered into rebellion against the king of Babylon, and in the twelfth year of his reign (586 BC), after a siege of six months, Jerusalem fell. The city and the temple were pillaged and burned and another large number of captives, including Zedekiah, was led into the Babylonian Captivity.

As governor of the conquered land, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, a Jew, who was not of the royal family. Three months later, he was assassinated by Ishmael, who was of royal blood. Ishmael sought to establish control over the land but Johanan, one of the army captains who had been in the field when Jerusalem fell, defeated him and drove him out of the land. To escape the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar Jehonon led a large group of Jews into Egypt, against the advice of Jeremiah, who was forced to accompany the fleeing Jews.

It is against the background of this political history that the book of Jeremiah must be read.

### **THE SUFFERING OF JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah has been called “the martyr of the prophetic office.” He endured great physical suffering because of his devotion to the duty that God had laid upon him. We have no record of such persecution during the reign of Josiah. At the time of his death Jeremiah had been active for about twenty years and was perhaps 38 or 39 years old.

But early in the reign of Jehoiakim the people of his own hometown, the village of Annathath, a suburb of Jerusalem, plotted to kill him. Jeremiah learned of their plans by direct revelation from the Lord and he complained bitterly, “I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying...Let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may no more be remembered (11:19)”. When their secret plottings were discovered, they openly threatened to kill him if he did not stop preaching, for they said, “Prophecy not in the name of the Lord, that thou die not by our hand (11:21).”

Discouraged and dismayed by this experience, Jeremiah inquired of the Lord why wicked man like this prosper while the Lord’s faithful people must suffer. The Lord’s answer to Jeremiah made clear to him that this was only a mild beginning. God said to him, “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?” We might paraphrase the Words of the Lord in this way, “Do you think this is bad? You haven’t seen anything yet. Up to now you have been racing with men on foot. One of these days you are going to be called upon to race with men on horseback. Up to now things have pretty quiet around here, but soon the Jordan will overflow. What are you going to do then?”

The “swelling of the Jordan” was not long in coming. Jeremiah was commanded by God to go to Jerusalem and there proclaim the doom of the city. The reaction there was similar to that, which he had experienced in his hometown. The people resented his preaching, especially his attacks leveled against the priests and the prophets and the learned scholars of Jerusalem. They threatened to beat him and they agreed that they would pay no attention to his words.

Jeremiah refused to be intimidated. He went into the temple court and there repeated his prediction of doom for Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah (19:14,15). On this occasion his enemies were not satisfied with making threats against him. Pashur, the overseer of the temple, had him beaten and placed in the stocks, where he was forced to remain until the next day (20:1-3). What must have made the suffering of Jeremiah hardest of all to bear was the fact that it was especially the spiritual leaders of his people who led the forces arrayed against him. He himself came from a priestly family, and to endure this indignity from Pashur, his fellow-priest, must have wounded the spirit of Jeremiah deeply.

It was not long after this that the Lord sent Jeremiah back to the temple to call the people back to repentance once more and to threaten destruction as a consequence of continued impenitence. This time a mob of people gathered in the court of the temple under the leadership of the priests and the prophets (I suppose that today we would say synodical officials and preachers!) and the death sentence was pronounced upon Jeremiah by the religious leaders. However, the princes heard of the uproar and they came to the temple to restore order. The priests and the prophets continued to insist that Jeremiah should be killed because he prophesied against the temple, but some of the old men called attention to the fact that almost a hundred years before this time the prophet Micah had spoken words that were very similar to the words of Jeremiah, and Hezekiah who was king at the time had not put Micah to death. The people were swayed by this argument, and they, together with the princes, protected Jeremiah from the wrath of his fellow priests and fellow prophets. Especially one of the city officials, Ahikim the son of Shaphan, did much to save the life of Jeremiah. But how dangerous it was to be a true prophet of the Lord was illustrated by the death of Uriah of Kirjathjearim, who preached the same sort of message as Jeremiah and who was pursued into Egypt by Jehoiakim's police force, arrested, brought back to Jerusalem and sentenced to die by Jehoiakim (26:1-24).

Several years later, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah had a graphic demonstration of the contempt in which the king held his preaching. For some reason that is not quite clear to us, Jeremiah was not permitted to enter the temple (36:5). But the Lord commanded him to dictate his message to Baruch, his secretary, who was then to read the prophets words in the temple. The princes confiscated the role on which the prophecies of Jeremiah were written at the same time warning Baruch the he and Jeremiah should hide and let no man know where they were. When the princes brought the role to Jehoiakim, he listened to the reading of a few pages and then took the role, cut it to pieces, and, in spite of the pleading of three of the princes, threw it into the fire. Having burned the book, he ordered both Jeremiah and Baruch to be arrested, but Jeremiah tells us simply, "The Lord hid them."

The eleven years of the reign of Jehoiakim were very difficult for Jeremiah. We do not know how the prophet fared during the early years of Zedekiah. The record as we have it seems to indicate that he was able to move about more freely and that, for a time at least, physical persecution came to an end. But toward the close of the reign of Zedekiah it began once more, and this time it was the princes who turned against him. When Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, Jeremiah counseled both king and people to surrender. He told them that all their efforts were destined to fail, that the city would be taken in any case, and that the only assurance of escape from famine and death lay in immediate submission to the yoke of Babylon. Jeremiah himself remained in Jerusalem urging his countrymen to save their lives by obedience to the word of God. When the army of the Babylonians lifted the siege of Jerusalem for a short time because Nebuchadnezzar heard that an army was marching from Egypt to rescue the city, it seemed that Jeremiah's prophecy was not to be fulfilled. And during this lull in the fighting Jeremiah wanted to leave the city to take care of some business matter that is not fully described for us. But as he was passing through the gate, he was arrested by a sentry and charged with treason. Jeremiah vehemently denied the foolish charge that he was falling away to the Chaldeans (37:13-14), but in spite of his denials the civil authorities put him into a dungeon where he remained for many days.

Some time after Jeremiah was imprisoned, the Babylonians returned to renew the siege of Jerusalem. In desperation, Zedekiah, without the knowledge of the princes, had the prophet brought to the palace to ask him, "Is there any word from the Lord?" to which Jeremiah replied that the Word of the Lord was the Zedekiah was to go into captivity. At the same time he made use of the opportunity to ask that he not be returned to the dungeon in the house of Jonathan. Zedekiah thereupon ordered that Jeremiah was to be put into the custody of the palace guard and that he was to receive a daily ration of bread until all the bread in the city was consumed (37:16-21).

The prophet employed the more favorable conditions to renew his predictions of the fall of the city and his call to repentance. The princes now charged that he was undermining the morale of the troops and they demanded the death penalty for the prophet. Zedekiah did not have the courage to resist their demands and gave

them permission to do what they pleased with Jeremiah. They therefore cast him into an abandoned cistern in the house of Malchiah. Here he was left to starve sitting in mud and muck (38:1-6).

But a negro servant in the palace, Ebed-Melech, interceded for Jeremiah with the king and once more Jeremiah was released from the dungeon and placed into the custody of the palace guard, where he remained until the city fell (38:7-13, 28).

This is the account of the physical suffering of Jeremiah in the course of his ministry. However, these bodily tortures were by no means the cause of his deepest pains. When he speaks of the sorrow that broke his heart, he mentions these things very seldom. There are other things that trouble him far more. It is very evident as we read his book, that he was deeply wounded by the contempt in which he was held by the people of his time. Modern psychology makes much of the need of being accepted by the group. This need was not fulfilled for Jeremiah.

He could even find it in the love and understanding of a good wife and a family, for as a part of his testimony to his people God commanded him, "Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons and daughters in this place."

Nor were there many people in whom he could trust. Even his own relatives were ready to denounce him and hand him over to his enemies, and God told him, "Believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee" (12:6). There were many people who spoke to him without apparent rancor, who, when they met him greeted him with the familiar, "Peace be with you," but he says of them, "All my familiars watched for my halting." Dr. Laetsch, in his commentary on Jeremiah, translates in this way, "Every one of my intimate friends was anxiously watching for a misstep on my part: Perhaps he will be deceived so that we may overcome him and take our revenge on him." If this is what he had to say about these who pretended to be his friends, what must he have said about his enemies!

And, in reality, there were many people in Judah who did not greet him with a friendly "Shalom", "Peace be unto you," when they met him. Instead they pronounced curses and maledictions upon him. He was constantly involved in controversy. Like our Savior, he was a man who aroused opposition wherever he went. He was not a man of peace. One day all the bitterness engendered by these experiences welled up in his soul, and he complained, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me (15:10)". And then all of the loneliness of his life found expression in the poignant assertion, "I sat alone because of thy hand (15:17)".

And all the while he had to suffer the ridicule and mockery of the people. It is significant that when he was released from the stocks by Pashur, the overseer of the temple, he does not say one word about the physical discomfort which he endured. Instead he speaks of the derision that was heaped upon him, and we can imagine how the best people in Judah, who still came to the temple to worship, ridiculed him as he sat as a evildoer in the stocks by the wayside. He says, "I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me (20:7)... My days are consumed with shame (20:18)". What makes this mockery so much more difficult to bear was the fact that it was so undeserved. It came upon him because he preached the Word of God. He complains, "The word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily (20:8). But the predicted calamity was slow in coming and men taunted him and said, "Where is now the word of the Lord? Let it come now" (17:15). They called him a phycophathic case, a madman, and even when his predictions began to be fulfilled they still accused him of making *himself* a prophet (29:26).

But even these suffering are not the cause of his deepest grief. The greatest heartbreak that he experienced came to him when he saw what was happening to his people. There is perhaps no greater source of discouragement to a teacher or preacher of God's Word than to see his words fall repeatedly on the hard ground of impenitent hearts. For over forty years this was the experience of Jeremiah.

We have seen that the reform movements under Josiah took place in the early years of his ministry. But with a discerning eye Jeremiah saw that the returned to practice of piety was to a large extent outward show and sham repentance. The Lord Himself told him, "Judah hath not returned unto me with her whole heart, but

feignedly” (3:10). How superficial their repentance was is graphically illustrated by Jeremiah when he relates how, in the siege of Jerusalem, Zedekiah and the people of the city solemnly resolved that they would set free all Hebrew slaves in obedience to the law of God regarding the sabbatical year, but when the danger seem to pass for awhile, they once more brought the freed slaves into bondage (31:6-17). And toward the close of his ministry Jeremiah had another clear demonstration of the hypocritical nature of their repentance. After the fall of Jerusalem the people that were left sent for Jeremiah and asked him to pray for them. They also asked him to reveal to them the Lord’s will and they promised to obey. But when Jeremiah’s advice did not agree with their wishes, they refused to listen, and Jeremiah denounced their hypocrisy in the words, “Ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it” (42:20).

Throughout his book, Jeremiah again and again voices this complaint against his people that they would not listen to the words of the Lord. They would not hearken. They would not hear. They would not obey. These statements occur with unbroken regularity from the beginning of his ministry to the end.

Strangely enough, Jeremiah has much to say of their religiosity. They were not an irreligious people. They were proud of their temple. In fact, they were sure that their city would never be destroyed because the Lord’s house was built there, and Jeremiah criticizes them for speaking so much about the temple of the Lord and for saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” (7:4).

One of the tragedies that is repeated again and again in the life of the church is this that when men have lost the practice of the true religion, they have found it necessary to increase the outward display of piety, and when they have become unwilling to take God’s Word seriously, they often become so much more serious in proclaiming the wisdom of their own minds, and when the fire has gone out in the heart, they felt the necessity of lighting a few more candles on the altar. And so it was in the days of Jeremiah. The beat was none too good for the temple of the Lord, but God said, “To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me” (6:20).

And when we look at the revival of religion in our own time, before we sing a *Te Deum* because the postoffice cancellations call upon us to pray, and our citizens pledge allegiance to one nation *under God*, and our paper money displays the words, “In God we trust”, we might remember what Jeremiah has to say about the piety of his people. As he saw them go about their devotions the sight brought him no happiness. In fact, their exaggerated piety was a source of pain and sorrow to him. He writes, “According to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal” (11:13; cp. also 2:28).

The land also was full of prophets, and those prophets enjoyed the favor of the people. They spoke the words that the people wanted to hear. They assured them of the love of God, and promised them they would have peace. What they had to say seemed to be in harmony with God’s promise to Israel. In fact, Jeremiah says that God had said to this people, “Ye shall have peace” (4:10). But they were stealing the words of the Lord, as Jeremiah puts it (23:30), that is, they were using the Lord’s words in an unauthorized way. We would say in our terminology that they preached Gospel and ignored the preaching of the Law. They did this because this kind of preaching was profitable. It was a way to make sure they would offend no one in the congregation so that they would be sure to get their regular raises in salary. Over and over Jeremiah accuses them of covetousness. “From the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (8:10,11), he says. And this is what pleased the Jews. “My people love to have it so,” he writes. Jeremiah they persecuted and the false prophets they honored.

This kind of preaching encouraged the Jews to continue in their evil ways. Jeremiah tells us how he walked through the streets of Jerusalem looking for one honest man (5:1). He began among the common people and when he was unsuccessful, he tried to excuse them because they were poor and had never been properly instructed (5:2-4). So he decided to look for such a man among the wealthy and educated, the leaders of Jerusalem, and he found that they, for all their respectability, were even worse (5:5).

It is significant that it is in connection with these things rather than in respect to the torture and the mockery that he had to endure that Jeremiah expresses his deepest sorrow. When he deals with the rebelliousness of his people, he says, "I am pained at my very heart" (4:19). When he speaks of the impenitence of Judah he writes, "Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain daughter of my people" (9:1). Because they refuse to listen to his words, he said, "Mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears." When he thinks of the false prophets and their deception of the people, he writes, "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets" (23:9).

But we ought to note that it is not only pain that he feels as he takes note of the wickedness of his people. "I am full of the fury of the Lord", he says (6:11). There comes a time when Jeremiah speaks a terrible curse over his people and prays that God may punish them (12:3, 20; 18:19-23). Leslie, in his commentary on Jeremiah, says that these expressions show that "Jeremiah did not qualify for sainthood in the Christian sense of the term" (p. 141). He asserts also that they show "how far the noblest piety of the Old Testament still is from the heights reached in the New Testament" (p. 151). Just like the prophets whom Jeremiah condemns, Leslie quotes Jesus' words, "Father, forgive them," and forgets that the time will come when this same Jesus will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire."

These, then, were the experiences that would discourage any mortal man from continuing in the course on which he had set out. Often in the hours of physical pain that came to him Jeremiah must have been tempted to give up the prophetic office as a bad job. The hatred of his countrymen, the enmity of the officials of his church, the priests and the prophets, the animosity of the princes, all must have been a constant source of discouragement to him. Like Luther, he must have often asked himself, "Are you alone wise? When so many men and such great men are opposed to you, can you be right?" And when he saw how all his words fell to the ground and nothing seemed to be accomplished by all his preaching, it is indeed an amazing thing that he did not simply throw up his hands and say, "What's the use?"

### **THE SECRET OF JEREMIAHS COURAGE AND PERSEVERANCE**

As we, therefore, review the career of Jeremiah and consider the physical and mental torments that he had to endure, we might expect that he would give up the ministry as a bad job. Yet he suffered and he wept and he lamented and he cursed, but for almost a half century he remained adamant in his resolve and faithful in the performance of his duty.

There were times when in discouragement he was ready to quit. On the day when he was released from the stocks he went home and he tells us how he thought of the derision and the mockery that he had endured in the stocks and which he had endured every day of his life, he speaks of the defaming and the slandering that was going on behind his back, he remembers the treachery of those whom he had considered to be his friends, and then he tells us how on this day he made up his mind that he was going to quit. He writes, "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more of his name" (20:9). But he was not able to carry this resolution into practice, for he found that it was more difficult not to preach the word than to preach it. He says, "But there was, as it were, in my heart a burning fire shut up in my bones and I wore myself out trying to hold it in and I could not" (20:9 – literal translation).

Now, what was the source of such courage and devotion to duty? Basically it was a gift of God. When God called him, He gave him the promise, "Behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee" (1:18, 19). Some years later God renewed this promise in the words, "I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall" (15:20). It is very clear, therefore, that the courage that enabled him to persevere in the face of all difficulties was created in him by God.

It should, however, be noted that it was created in him by the means of the Word. God gave him a promise that he would be able to withstand the assaults of his enemies, and in each case he added another promise, "I am with thee....to deliver thee (1:19) ...They shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee ...And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the

hand of the terrible (15:20-21). It was with this promise that Jeremiah comforted himself on the day when he was released from the stocks. On that day he felt that all men were against him. It was on that day that he cursed the day when he was born. It was on that day that he asked, "Wherefore came I out of the womb to see labor and sorrow that my days should be consumes with shame" (20:18). But it was on that day also that he said, "But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail, (20:11). And in the midst of his complaining, he suddenly burst out in a doxology and says, "Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers" (20:13).

If we are to have the courage to say what needs to be said, if we are not to trim our sails to every wind, if we are to open our mouths to confess the Word of God, which is just as unpopular today as it was in the day of Jeremiah (and we often do not experience what he experienced because we know "when to keep our mouth shut"), then we will need this God-given courage, and we will it get only as we cling to the promises of God. We have the same promises that Jeremiah had. Some of the last words that our Lord left with his church before he ascended into heaven were these: "Lo, I am with you always." Our danger is that we begin to despise these promises, and when we hear them we are no longer satisfied with them and we look upon them as "old stuff." When that happens we have already lost the source of strength. We need to become as little children and in the naivete of the Christian faith find the way to the unshaken courage of a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

A second source of courage and perseverance that becomes very evident as we read the book of Jeremiah is his conviction that he was speaking the words of the Lord. The doctrine of verbal inspiration is emphasized more often in the book of Jeremiah than in any other book of the Bible. At the time of his call into the prophetic office, God gave him the promise, "I have put my words in thy mouth" (1:9). And throughout the book the words of Jeremiah are repeatedly called the words of the Lord. We read, for example, that God told him, "Proclaim all those words in the cities of Judah" (11:6). When the people would not take Jeremiah seriously they were accused of refusing to hear the words of the Lord (13:10; 22:5; 25:8; 29:19). Other passages calling our attention to this same truth are these:

- 1) Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there will I cause thee to hear *my words*. (18:2)
- 2) Go forth unto the valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee (19:2).
- 3) I will bring upon the land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations (25:13).
- 4) Prophecy thou against them all those words (25:30).
- 5) Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word (26:2).
- 6) Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book (30:2).
- 7) Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord, which he had spoken unto him (36:6).
- 8) Go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people (36:6).

The same words which are called "the words of the Lord" are also called "the words of Jeremiah (36:10). God had told Jeremiah, "Thou shalt be as my mouth" (15:19). It is important to stress these passages especially in these days when outright unbelievers are willing to speak of the Bible as the Word of God. How honest they are in employing this terminology becomes clear when they are called upon to admit that the Bible consists of *words* of God. Jeremiah also speaks of his message as the word of the Lord (1:4, 11, 13; 7:1; 9:20; 10:1; 11:1; 14:1-17; 16:1; 17:20; 18:1, 5; 19:3; 21:11; 25:3; 27:1; 28:12; etc. And like the other prophets he often introduces his messages with the phrases "Thus saith the Lord," or "The Lord said" (1:14; 2:5, 19, 22; 3:1, 6, 10, 12, 14; 4:3, 9, 27; 6:9 etc).

It is not without significance that Jeremiah tells us at the very beginning of his book that the Lord gave him the command, "Whatsoever I command thee, that shalt thou speak." He was sure that even though men did not want him to say such things, even though they told him, "prophesy not" (11:21), yet the Lord wanted him to say these things. He knew these things were right and true, and his conviction strengthened him in the days when he was tempted to be silent. And one day when his enemies mocked him because his words were not being fulfilled, he turned to the Lord in prayer and said, "That which came out of my lips was right before thee" (17:16). And because it was the word of the Lord, Jeremiah knew also that it would come true. At times he was discouraged because the Lord took so long to carry out his threats, and this was especially true when men mocked him because for years he had preaching doom and nothing had happened. But at the beginning of his ministry the Lord had promised him, "I will hasten my word to perform it" (1:12). He had the assurance that he was not speaking lies to his people. This is the charge that he constantly directed against the false prophets. When Hananiah said that the Babylonian Captivity would come to an end within two years and that the power of Babylon would be broken, Jeremiah said to him, "Thou makest this people to trust in a lie," and he told him that he would die before the year was out. Then, as an illustration of the truth of God's Word, he records the statement, "So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month" (28:17).

If we are to teach with the same perseverance and courage of Jeremiah, we must also have the conviction that what we say is the Word of the Lord. Here we see why the doctrine of verbal inspiration is so important to a Christian teacher today. I would want no part of a Holy ministry if I did not have the doctrine of verbal inspiration to back up the doctrine that I teach. We are dealing with the souls and the eternal welfare of men. There is no room for hit-and-miss teaching. If we are to stand before our children as their spiritual leaders we need to know, like Jeremiah, that the words in our mouth are the truth. If we know this however, we can say, as he did, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (15:16). To know that what we teach is God's Word, that it is eternal truth, that we have in our possession the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, all this should be to us a constant motivating force urging us on to perseverance and faithfulness. It was this conviction that made it possible for Luther to face daily danger with the confident courage and to say,

The word they still shall let remain,  
Nor any thanks have for it.  
He's by our side upon the plain  
With his good gifts and Spirit.  
And take they our life,  
Goods, fame, child, and wife,-  
Let these all be gone.  
They yet have nothing won.  
The kingdom ours remaineth."

When men therefore tell us today that our doctrine is outmoded, that scholarly men no longer accept the Bible as infallibly true, that scripture must be reinterpreted if we are to keep ourselves from becoming ridiculous in the eyes of the world, we need to remind ourselves that these words, written in this book, are the words of the Lord, and I would rather simply repeat God's words after him in childlike faith than to have the praise of those who have a form of godliness but who deny the power thereof.

One more source of courage and perseverance needs to be noted in the case of Jeremiah. It is not possible to read this book with attention and to fail to notice that the prophet was driven by an intense love of his people. He saw the destruction coming. He knew that if the Jews continued in their impenitence they would surely perish. And so he, says, "I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war" (4:19). He did not want them to perish. One of the most heart-rending verses in the book is that in which he hears his people say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (8:20). He knew that his people had very little time left, that the summertime of God's grace was running out,



that the time of harvest would soon come to an end. And when that time would come he knew that many of them would not be saved. And this thought would not let him rest. "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt, he said (8:21).

He wept for these people (9:1; 14:17) and he prayed for them (14:17-22). We can see the anguish of his soul when we hear his words "Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us" (14:21). And even when he finally moved to pronounce a curse upon his people, he says to the Lord, "Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away the wrath from them" (18:20). He was forced by the circumstances to proclaim the impending ruin of his people, he did not delight in their destruction. "I have not desired the woeful day" (17:16). He is to this day called the "prophet of gloom" and his message was not popular, but he knew that this was the only kind of teaching that would bring salvation to his people, and he could not rest until they either had been saved or all hope was lost.

He did not labor then for himself and for his own profit. After the fall of Jerusalem, he was offered a life of ease in Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar said to him, "If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee"(40:4). But he chose instead to stay with the people who remained in the land to give them the guidance of God's Word in their defeat and despair. To the end he was determined to do what he could for these people whom he loved. They repaid him with vilification and persecution but because he wanted them to find peace and salvation in God, he would not give in to the pressure that often filled him with discouragement.

This is an attribute that we need also today in our work as teachers of the Word. A teacher who does not love his pupils, (and I am here not talking about that natural love that adults often have for children) but the love that is deeply concerned about the spiritual and eternal welfare of these boys and girls), a teacher who does not love children in this way has lost one of the prime sources of motivation toward diligence and devotion to his work.

If we have this love and if we are conscious and convinced also of the fact that we really have the words of God in this book, the words which are able to make men wise unto salvation, we, too, should be equipped by God to persevere in spite of all difficulties and dangers. For then when we are tempted to say with Jeremiah, "I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name," "I am going to quit this whole business," we will also be driven to say with him, "But His Word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I wore myself out trying to hold it in and I could not stop." God grant it. Amen.