

LESSON 231

A PROPHET'S CALL

Related Scripture: Jeremiah 4:14-31

KEY VERSE: "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them."—Jeremiah 1:17.

Lesson Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10;
26:11-16

Introduction:

True prophets of God do not assume for themselves or accept from other men the office of speaking for God. Whether we think of prophets in the technical sense as having miraculous knowledge and visions, or whether we use the term more loosely to include faithful preachers of God's written word, God chooses and calls His own spokesmen.

Jeremiah is an example of a man who would not have dared to take upon himself a claim to prophesy or speak for God, but was nevertheless compelled by a divine call to accept the office. Only the clear realization that he is a chosen instrument of God can give a man the courage to preach a message that most people do not and will not believe and do not wish to hear.

Outlining the lesson, we note:

1. Speaking for God, Jer. 1:4-10
 - a. Purpose of God, 4, 5
 - b. Protest to God, 6
 - c. Promise of God, 7, 8
 - d. Prepared by God, 9
 - e. Program of God, 10
2. Suffering for God, Jer. 26:11-16
 - a. Priestly resentment, 11
 - b. Prophetic repetition, 12
 - c. Possible repentance, 13
 - d. Personal responsibility, 14, 15
 - e. Popular respect, 16

Notes on the Printed Text:

Speaking for God, Jeremiah 1:4-10.

A true prophet speaks not for himself, but for God. There are, of course, many false prophets, who pretend to speak for God also; but God never called them, and their message is their own. Even when they speak some truth, it is because they consider it safe and expedient to do so; and they are generally willing to change their message to please the people. But the true prophet must speak the truth of God, even though it may cost him his life.

Purpose of God, 4, 5.

God always works according to plan. He had work for Jeremiah to do, and both the work and the worker had been in the divine purpose before Jeremiah was born. God makes no mistakes in choosing His instruments; they may seem to us quite inadequate to the task, but He accomplishes His purpose through whatever instrumentality it may please Him to use.

Protest to God, 6.

Jeremiah protested to God his own inability: "I cannot speak: for I am a child." As if God did not know our limitations!

Promise of God, 7, 8.

By himself Jeremiah might be as a child in ability, but in the capacity of a divinely called prophet he was to act in obedience to divine direction and with the assurance of divine power and protection.

Prepared by God, 9.

Natural eloquence or "gift of gab" is not enough; too many preachers have this and little else. God has more use for a faithful man with little talent than for a talented man with little faith. In Jeremiah's case, "the Lord put forth his hand, and touched" Jeremiah's mouth. God may manifest His "hand" in different ways, but whatever means He may use to put His words in the mouth of the prophet, the important point is that God prepares His men to speak His words.

Program of God, 10.

Men may set up their little programs of activity and become quite proud of themselves over these programs that are continually being adopted, revised, and abandoned for new, bigger, and supposedly better programs. But God already has a program for His people in this world, a program unchanging though variously stated, a program of spiritual attack upon the institutions of this present evil world, a program of spiritual building and planting for a better world to come. For a New Testament statement of this divinely appointed program, see II Corinthians 10:3-6.

Suffering for God, Jeremiah 26:11-16.

Those who live and work for God in this hostile world must expect to suffer for Him. "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33.) "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:16.) "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Tim. 3:12.)

Priestly Resentment, 11.

Generally speaking, the worst enemies of religious truth in this world are in the religious establishment. Religious institutions, even those originally instituted by God, tend toward corruption and accommodation with the world, while still claiming religious authority. Prime instigators of the crucifixion of Christ were not the common people or even the political authorities, but the religious leaders.

So "the priests and the prophets," who ought to have been declaring the divine message but were not doing so because they were out of touch with God, resented Jeremiah as the one man who dared to speak God's message of judgment to a sinful city.

Prophetic Repetition, 12.

Under the threat of death, a false prophet might well have changed his message. But the true prophet can only repeat the divine origin and truth of a message not subject to change.

Possible Repentance, 13.

Yet there is a way for men to escape the judgments of God. That way is not to kill the prophet who warns of judgment, but to "amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God." Humanly speaking, it appears that "the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced" when men repent of the sins that would incur judgment if they failed to meet conditions of mercy. Actually the change of course must come in man, not in God; there can be no change in God's holy law; sinners must accept mercy on God's terms in order to escape judgment.

Personal Responsibility, 14, 15.

As the prophet is responsible to God to speak the truth, the people are responsible to God to receive that truth. The principle of personal responsibility is distasteful to the social gospellers, but their anserine theories cannot change the truth: God "will render to every man according to his deeds." (Ro. 2:6.)

Popular Respect, 16.

Note again that the common people and their "princes" or political leaders had more respect for a true prophet of God than did the "priests and prophets" of the religious establishment. This is a normal state of affairs in the history of the world.

Key Verse:

"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them."
—Jeremiah 1:17.

Let every God-called preacher gird his loins for action; let him stand his ground and speak boldly, not what he thinks but what God says. Above all, let him not be dismayed by the forbidding faces of men; the one sure way to be put to shame before all is to displease God by vainly trying to please men.