

NOVEMBER 29, 1992

FAITHFULNESS UNDER FIRE

We hear a lot of sayings that speak about not giving up when times are difficult: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That's a nice saying, but what is likely to happen is that when the going gets tough, a lot of people drop out. Those that abandon a cause when they meet opposition are "summer soldiers" or what we might call a fair weather friend. In the early days of our country, those early colonist would not have stayed to settle in this new land if they had not had the courage to remain faithful in the hard times of a bitterly cold winter. The descendants of those colonists would have never won their independence nor have begun a new nation founded on the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ if they had not had the courage to be faithful under fire.

Thousands of years before our part of the world was known, there were people who were faithful under fire and would dare to speak the truth of God's word even if it threatened their very lives. Jeremiah was one such prophet that faced rejection, imprisonment and death because of his willingness to take a stand for the truth. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet by God before he was born. Jeremiah did not learn of this call until he was a young man or a teenager. When God called him, Jeremiah protested that he was too young, but youth nor age matter when God is working through a person's life. It is not our ability but the power of God that matters when we are doing the work of the Lord. We can always find that we are too young, too old, too tired, too slow, too poor, too sick, too busy to go where God calls us IF we are looking to ourselves as the source of our ability. Just as in the case of Jeremiah, God does not accept our excuses, instead, He expects our obedience because He is sufficient to make up for what we lack.

JEREMIAH 1:9-10 We cannot tell from this passage if God's call of Jeremiah was in a vision as in the case of Isaiah or by some other means. Jeremiah excuse was that he did not know how to speak or, as we might put it, he did not know what to tell the people. This concern would seem to be a very legitimate one. God had a plan to cover that concern. The symbolism and focal point to which Jeremiah could look back on in future years was that of God touching his lips so that God's words would be in his mouth. This act would give Jeremiah assurance that what he said was the truth of God's word.

God's commission of Jeremiah was that he was to be a prophet to the nations indicating that the words that he would deliver would relate to Judah and her neighbors. The prophetic words that Jeremiah would proclaim would be more powerful than the might of these nations and in his ministry he would expose the false foundations that the people had built on and in doing so would pull down the facades and destroy the images of everything being good and prosperous. At the same time, he would proclaim the truth upon which the nation would be rebuilt and would plant the seeds of faith that would sustain the people during their exile in Babylon.

Jeremiah was not a very popular person. The nation was on a path to destruction but those in the government refused to see what was happening. They were building alliances with their neighbors and relying on these treaties for their safety rather than repenting and turning to God to seek forgiveness for their sinful lifestyles. To complicate matters, there were false prophets that were telling the king that all was well and prosperity was just around the corner. Along comes Jeremiah and tells the bitter truth that God's judgement is just around the corner and that the nation is going to be defeated by Babylon. We could predict that nobody wanted to believe him. They just wanted to shut him up. This sort of rejection by most people and his having only a few friends made Jeremiah examine his calling many times. In these conversations with God, Jeremiah would be candid in his feelings as he poured out his complaint to God.

JEREMIAH 20:7-8 Jeremiah has been called the weeping prophet and in this confession we can see that he was not a happy person with how his life had turned out. He reminded God that he did not want to be a prophet but was seduced into agreeing to be one. Jeremiah did not imagine how hard-hearted and hard-headed people could be. He did not imagine how he would be ridiculed and rejected by people he was trying to help. He thought that since God was empowering him to deliver the message that everyone would accept the message and him. Not true! People do not want to hear the truth in most cases especially when the message is that of impending judgement.

JEREMIAH 20:9 Jeremiah was so frustrated that he had promised himself that he was not going to prophecy (deliver God's message) to these people again. However, he just could not keep quiet when he had a message from God. Even though he no longer wanted to preach God's message, the truth still came out. At times he would tell the king to believe the false prophets but they thought that he was just being sarcastic with them and the message that God wanted the king to hear still came through.

JEREMIAH 20:10-11 Jeremiah was treated as a suspected traitor. Everyone was watching him and looking for evidence they could use to turn him in to the authorities. Many wanted him dead. Jeremiah, however, came to realize through all of this tribulation that God was with him even as He had promised. He kept his confidence that God's words were true and that what he prophesied would come to pass. Jeremiah had confidence that all his detractors would be proven wrong, but that did not make life any easier for him. He still felt rejected and friendless.

Jeremiah was faithful to God's calling even though it was difficult. He questioned his role in delivering the message, but he did not doubt the truth of the message. We can learn from Jeremiah's experience. One lesson is that "the truth hurts." Many times the one that is hurt is not the hearer but the one that proclaims the truth. We can also see from Jeremiah's life that proclaiming the truth is more important than being popular. As we see what is going on around us, we do not have to be a prophet of the magnitude of Jeremiah to realize that our nation is heading in the wrong direction and that God's judgement is going to come on us and the rest of the world. If we realize this, then we have an obligation to proclaim that concern and to warn others.