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Guidance for the last days!

A message preached by Rev Ivan Foster on Jeremiah chapter 38 in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church at the 44th Annual Day of Prayer, August 18th, 2019.

It is 45 years ago on August 17th, 1974, that the hall here was opened for the proclamation of the Gospel. It had been built by the men and indeed, the womenfolk, who formed the beginnings of the witness here. The following year, there began the custom of holding this season of prayer both as a time of thanksgiving and also of intercession for loved ones and the land!

Times have changed over the 45 years, though we are seeing the increasing apostasy that has now almost totally engulfed the United Kingdom.

In the midst of such departure and defiance of God, we look for a word from the Lord.

All too many guess at the will of God for today, basing their notions on history, God's merciful dealings in the past and other self-generated ideas.

In so doing they misrepresent the Lord and mislead the people!

God has a word for His people today. It is one which He has enunciated since the beginning. The 'last days' are referred to from Genesis to Revelation. This is illustrated when Jeremiah was asked by Zedekiah, "Is there any word from the LORD?", Jeremiah 37:17. The answer that Jeremiah gave is not a new one but that which he had been preaching since the beginning of his ministry. "Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

There is no national recovery or revival for Judah though individuals are offered mercy. See the second interview Jeremiah had with the king. "Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand," 38:17-18. The city was going to be taken and the citizens taken into bondage but to surrender to the Babylonians meant that it would not be destroyed nor the people slaughtered.

It is most wrong to presume on God's mercy to a people, simply on the basis of God's mercy in former times! Mercy is exhausted on this defiance people who have rejected His Word for generations.

The apostasy of today here in Ulster had its first manifestations back over 100 years ago, almost in the wake of the great 1959 revival which swept the United Kingdom, especially here in Ulster.

The devil has always counter-attacked the cause of God in the days immediately following a season of blessing! The temptation of Adam and Eve is an example of that. God's creation of the perfect man and woman was followed by the devil's attempt to corrupt and destroy God's creation. That pattern may be seen throughout history.

Of course, there will be an end to this ongoing, increasing rebellion as Proverbs 1:24-33 clearly shows.

There is an end to patience and mercy and long-suffering! That was seen in Noah's flood, in the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and also in the days of Jeremiah when, despite many warnings and centuries of patient remonstrations, Judah adamantly refused them all and now she is reaping what she sowed.

I might just say that so it will be in the ultimate intervention in judgment by the Lord when He comes in power and glory to avenge Himself upon a defiant world, of which event we have a picture in the day of



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visitation upon Jerusalem. Man has become his own God, deciding what 'Law' he will obey! He loves himself and his opinions rather than the Lord and His judgments and decrees, see 2 Timothy 3:2.

In this chapter before us, which records events some 40 years after the start of Jeremiah's ministry, we see:

I. THE STUBBORN DEFIANCE OF THE LEADERS OF JUDAH AGAINST THE LORD'S MESSAGE

Verses 1-4.

1. How plain and certain was the message of God! "Thus saith the LORD, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live. Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it," verses 2-3. Certain life or certain death!

2. Even at this late hour there was mercy. We can never extol the mercy of God too highly. He is the one Who saves men like the repentant thief on the very doorstep of hell!

3. How brave was Jeremiah! In the face of the violent opposition of the elders, he continued to speak the truth. 26:11. This was some 20 years earlier. Were it not for the Lord's intervention, the witness of truth would have been extinguished by wicked men, Jeremiah 36:21-26.

The servants of the Lord in these last days will need the same courage as Jeremiah.

4. He continued his witness to the end. "So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was there when Jerusalem was taken," verse 28. He witnessed to God's mercy, verse 17 and to God's judgment, verse 18.

This must be our testimony today in these last times!

II. IN THE LAST DAYS OF THIS AGE, AS IT WAS IN THE LAST DAYS OF JERUSALEM, SOME 2600 YEARS AGO, IT WILL BE MAN'S WISDOM VERSUS GOD'S TRUTH.

"Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt," verse 4.

It was then as it was in Paul's day and continues to our day. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God," 1 Corinthians 1:18.

This foolishness has penetrated the ranks of God's people! The issue of modern translations illustrates this. How many 'evangelical' witnesses have thrown out the God-honoured 'Authorised Bible' for one of the modern 'perversions' simple in order to 'keep in' with the opinions of 'modern scholars'??!!

This is embracing 'man's wisdom' and rejecting 'God's wisdom'!

The rejection of God's wisdom for man's wisdom is:

1. The road of individual ruin. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. . . . He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John 3:18, 36.

2. The road of national ruin. "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same," Job 4:8. "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices," Proverbs 1:29-31.



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3. The road of universal ruin. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds," Romans 2:4-6.

III. TO THE END, GOD WILL DEFEND AND MAINTAIN HIS WITNESS.

Verses 6-13. Note the information given us of this helper of Jeremiah.

1. His name. 'Ebedmelech'. It means 'the servant of the king'. He was a slave.

2. His nation. He was an Ethiopian. He was an alien within Judah's society!

3. He was a eunuch. A despised being considered as one dead!

Is this not in keeping with the provision God made for Elijah at the hands of the widow of Zarephath? "And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee," 1 Kings 17:8-9.

Such will ever be the estimation by men of those who stand up for the cause of God and the truth of His Word in the last days!

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

But there was a message for this poor despised defender of Jeremiah! "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD," Jeremiah 39:15-18.

Dear Christian, such is the assurance of divine protection given to those who prove faithful in the lasts days!