

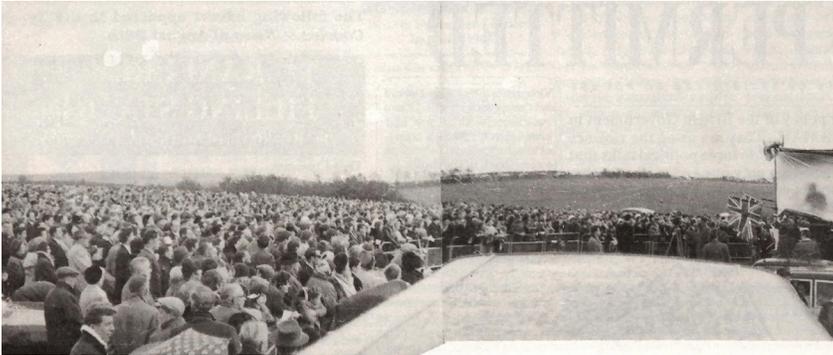


## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

### "IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD?"

(Synopsis of the message preached by Rev Ivan Foster at the 'Welcome Home' rally 50 years ago today)

*"Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon," Jeremiah 37:17.*



A section of the 12,000 strong crowd at the "welcome home" rally

This is the text I preached upon 50 years ago on Oct 23rd, 1966, at the 'Welcome Home' rally at Dundonald on the fringes of Belfast. It was organised by the Free Presbyterian Church after the release of Dr Paisley, Rev John Wylie and myself from the Crumlin Road Prison on the previous Wednesday and Thursday. Dr Paisley was arrested a day earlier than John and myself so he was released a day earlier. The meeting was chaired by Rev S B Cooke who was Deputy Moderator.

There is an brief account of the gathering and the opposition it encountered given in "The Revivalist" back then and reproduced on pages 31-32 of "**A time to be Remembered**".

I only wish I had some record of the messages preached that day by Dr Paisley, Rev John Wylie or Dr Bob Jones Jr for they would make much better reading than do the words of my brief address. However, I don't have any recollection of what those men preached. I do remember something of what it was I sought to say, not because it was more important and certainly not because it was better articulated. No, for a much more simple reason I can recall my own message.

The Lord had led me to Jeremiah 37:17 in the final days of our 3-month jail sentence as the text I should speak on at the meeting in Dundonald. I had a simple outline of the text impressed by the Lord upon my heart. As was often the habit in those days of Holy Ghost liberty, I had jotted down my three headings in the margin of my Bible and intended preaching from these 'notes'.

I was called upon to speak first, being the most junior person on the platform, then Rev John Wylie followed by Dr Bob Jones and finally, with a powerful closing message, Dr Ian Paisley.

Today, 50 years later the weather is calm but on that day long ago, it was quite blustery, especially on the high platform from which we spoke.

I was speaking only for a few minutes when the wind stirred the pages on my Bible and it no longer lay open at Jeremiah 37! It may seem most strange but I was never able, for the remainder of the time I spoke, to remember or find the chapter from which I was preaching or the few notes written down in the margin. I can only believe that the Lord was teaching me a solemn and very important lesson on that almost overwhelming occasion. I was addressing at least 12,000 people, indeed it was likely that there were many, many more than that gathered on that day. Dr Jones Jr said to me when the meeting had concluded: "I feel sorry for you today. Most men would consider it a crowning honour at the end of their ministry to speak to such a multitude, but here you are at the beginning of your ministry and it is likely you will never address such a crowd again!" Well, he was correct. I never did address such a crowd again. That day saw me sharing a platform with great men before a vast crowd while still a student minister.

Doubtless, there was a great danger in such a setting for a novice, but the Lord intervened to safeguard



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I believe that He ordered the circumstances that day. The wind did His bidding, my memory could not recall the number of the chapter and verse in Jeremiah and though, while I preached, I did try, the best I could, turning over the pages of my Bible, I never did come on the chapter 37 during the 20 minutes or so that I spoke.

I think that after some desperate and panic-stricken searching, I was made to realise that I should rely upon the Lord for His help in recalling the three points that I had written down in the margin of my Bible.

I learned a very important lesson that day and it lives with me still. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding," Proverbs 3:5.

I would like to give a synopsis of my message that day for it lives with me still.

### I. THIS TEXT DISPLAYS THE COURAGE OF THE PROPHET

He was taken out of prison and asked by the king if he had any message from God. Despite the dread of being returned to prison that overshadowed poor Jeremiah, he was faithful to God.

He did greatly fear being returned to the prison cell. "Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there," verses 18-20.

Yet despite the fear he had of the dreadful prison from which he was taken and the likelihood of being returned there, Jeremiah faithfully preached God's message.

In like manner, courage is needed amongst God's servants, despite the threat of prosecution by an evil O'Neillite government, to proclaim the Word of God.

### II. IT IS TO BE NOTED THAT JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE WAS THE SAME AS HE HAD PREACHED BEFORE

"Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Jeremiah had preached that message earlier to the arousing of much animosity against himself.

"For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; and Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; and he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the LORD: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper;" 32:2-5.

God's Word does not change though men may wish it were so. How wrong it would have been for Jeremiah to water down God's Word in order to avoid the consequences which may have followed his offending the king and his princes!

God's grace is needed by His servants today in the face of the opposition of the ecumenical church/state amalgam and its bullying tactics, to preach boldly God's undiluted, untrammelled truth.



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### III. JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE WAS OF JUDGMENT

There is no need for men to ask the question Zedekiah the king asked, doubtless in the hope of a compromising reply from the prophet. God's answer to sin, to rebellion, to apostasy, to rejection of His Word, is always the same - JUDGMENT!

"There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Public opinion changes. Government policies change. Political parties change their views. But God does not change!

He would have us return to the old paths. "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein," Jeremiah 6:16.

Let Ulster learn this. Let the enemies of God learn this. Let every Christian learn this.

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No change Jehovah knows,

Glory to His name.

All may change,

But Jesus NEVER!

Glory to His name.

As a footnote, may I make the observation that the words spoken that day in weakness are very relevant still and ought to be heeded.

Rev. Ivan Foster (Rtd.)

October 23rd, 2016.