

Articles and Sermons :: A cry For Revival by Yorrie Richards

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The Silent Millstones:

A Cry for Revival

By Yorrie Richards

Some years ago I had quite an amazing experience whilst reading the book of Jeremiah. I felt the Lord begin to reveal something of the very heart of the book, which is the cry of God for the return of the southern kingdom of Judah back to Himself. The effect the reading had upon me was something I could not explain or had bargained for and I was beginning to feel something of the rejection God was going through.

Sitting down with my Bible spread over my knees, tears were beginning to flow freely down my face. I began to realise that all the crying; the calling; the heartache and hurt was coming from God toward Judah. God called this young prophet Jeremiah, "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem saying; 'I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal when you went after me in the wilderness...Israel was holiness to the Lord...' (Jer.2:2-3). 'What injustice have your fathers found in me that you have gone far from me and followed idols' (2:6). 'They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water' (2:13).

I tried to continue reading, but found it so difficult that I eventually had to stop. I walked out of the room and Eirian, my wife, seeing me crying asked if anything was wrong. I showed her some of the verses that had brought me to tears. I have never forgotten that experience and it eventually led to the birth of a message which I entitled "The Crying Heart of God".

The following study is not that message, but is rooted in it. This message is very much alive in my heart at the moment due to the fact that I see much the same situation prevalent in the church today as found in the days of Jeremiah.

Introduction

The book of Jeremiah records the prophetic ministry of a man called in his youth from the priest-city of Anathoth, just over two miles north of Jerusalem. This heartbroken prophet carried a heartbreaking message and laboured for more than forty years proclaiming a call to repentance to the stiff-necked people of Judah. Yet he is despised and persecuted due to such a ministry. He bathes his harsh prophecies in tears, becoming known as the 'weeping prophet'. His preaching declared that a total surrender to God's will is the only way to escape an impending calamity, and that disaster was a judgement which God told Jeremiah would come from the north (in Scripture, judgement always comes from the north. Even the sacrifices offered by the priests were killed on the north side of the altar (Lev.1:11). Golgotha, 'The place of the skull'; that dreadful spot where Christ our Saviour shed His precious blood stands at the north side of the city of Jerusalem and is the actual location where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac. How precise God is!).

A Patient God

Two young men appeared on the scene in Israel following the death of Solomon. One was Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the other a very promising young man called Jeroboam, a well-trusted and important servant of Solomon. Solomon's death brought Rehoboam to the throne but his reign, which lasted for seventeen years, was not a good one. Through some very serious but unwise decisions he caused a rift within the then-united Israel which resulted in the breakaway of ten of the twelve tribes. They set up their kingdom in Samaria and Jeroboam was chosen as their king. But his reign brought the northern tribes into an 'orgy' of unrestricted idolatry. I call it 'suicidal idolatry' for that is what it became. He set up two golden calves, one in Bethel, the other in Dan and also built a temple and established his own independent priest system as he wanted to divert Israel from going to Jerusalem to worship. All this was a dreadful violation of the commands of God who had made it clear that the tribes were to worship there. Jeroboam consciously set about fostering a separate identity of Israel. So what finally became of the northern tribes? Following the reign of nineteen kings, of whom none followed the Lord, the tribes were finally overrun by the Assyrians in 722BC, becoming

known as the "lost tribes of Israel" due to the terrible method of the dispersion of captives. By contrast, Judah lasted one hundred and thirty years longer due to the fact that out of twenty kings, eight were good and did what was right.

Enter Jeremiah

Jeremiah was called as a prophet during the reign of Josiah, the last of Israel's good kings. He tried to stem the tide of apostasy through well-meaning reforms, but failed. The downhill slide of Judah goes on into sin and idolatry and continues unabated through a succession of four godless kings; they wallow in apostasy.

In the book of Jeremiah, God is seen as patient and holy; He delays judgement and appeals through this young prophet to His people Judah, calling them to repentance before it is too late.

In Jeremiah 18:2, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah; "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words". In obedience Jeremiah goes to the potter and watches as he skilfully throws a lump of clay onto the spinning wheel and begins to form it into a vessel. Then something happens, the clay loses its shape and crumples into a formless mass, but the potter takes it again, presses it into a ball and throws the clay again onto the wheel, recreating another form. As Jeremiah watches this action taking place, something warms in his heart and he states, "Then the word of the Lord came to me saying: O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel" (Verses 3-6). The prophet has received the basis of another message to deliver to the God-rejecting people. And what is the word he is to bring? "Thus says the Lord: "Behold I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good" (Jeremiah 18: 11). But what was the response to such a message?

"That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will, every one do the imagination of his evil heart" (Verse 12). How much like the book of Judges is that statement: "Every man did what was right in his own eyes!" (Judges 17:6) How blatant a rejection of the word of God and yet one only has to read the rest of the chapter to see the crying heart of a patient God and to hear the open, horrific rejection to His pleadings. Because they refuse to repent or even listen to God's prophet, the divine cure is going to require radical surgery.

One can well imagine the sheer frustration of Jeremiah. How long can he continue preaching to a rebellious people? He often desires to resign from his prophetic office due to the harshness of his message and its hostile reception and he tells us a little of how he felt in chapter twenty: "Then I said, "I will not make mention of God, nor speak any more in His Name" Yet his understandable feelings are more than he could ever sustain - "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back". (20:9). Listen to how depressed he really is; "Cursed be the day in which I was born! Let not the day be blessed in which my mother bore me...why did I come forth from the womb to see labour and sorrow?" (20:14-18)

What a terrible loneliness he obviously felt, much like Elijah when he cried to the Lord: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:10).

In Jeremiah 25 we hear the prophet say; "This is the twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened, nor inclined your ear to hear." (Verse 4)

"Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not heard my words...behold, I will send and take all the families of the north says the Lord and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant and will bring them against this land, against the inhabitants, and against these nations all around..." (25: 8-9)

Please note the list of things God states He was going to take from Judah in verses 10-11: "Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the groom, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp, and this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years".

Millstones were the means of grinding the corn and wheat for the production of bread. The sound of grinding must have been a very familiar and perhaps even comforting to the people. But God tells them that the sound of grinding would be heard in the land no longer. What does that speak of?

Famine!

The Scriptures speak a lot of famine. In fact, there are thirteen famines recorded in the Bible and a number of them are the result of judgement. One only has to read the first chapter of the book of Joel as he speaks to the southern kingdom of Judah to see the effects of famine on the house of God.

The prophet Elijah was sent by God to face up to the incredibly evil king Ahab and tell him; "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, there shall be no dew or rain these years except at my word" (1Sam.17:1). Elijah knew the word and aligned his word with God's! No prophet can simply do signs and wonders without a clear knowledge of the principles of Scripture. The principles laid out in the Bible tell us the way God will work in any given situation. Elijah realised that the covenant laid out in Deuteronomy 28 stated that if Israel walked in obedience, great blessing would be upon them and the land. Scripture links Israel and the land together. Like fish and water; love and marriage. The covenant with Abraham involved his descendants and the land.

Elijah also knew full well that if Israel walked in rebellion, then God would stop the rains. No mention is made of the duration of that famine in 1 Samuel, but according to James in his epistle it lasted three years six months. (Jm.5:17) Scientists show that it takes about three years for a famine to establish itself. It is a slow, creeping mother of all disasters, turning fertile ground into sun-cracked desert. There is no rain because of a closed up heaven.

It is my sincere understanding that the church and our land go together. Can I ask you this: have there been signs in our nation that show a possible disfavour with God? Again in my understanding, there is an abundance of such. I recall our televisions showing huge fires in the countryside with the hooves of cattle pointing upwards as the fires consumed their carcasses during the foot and mouth outbreak. Lorry loads of slaughtered sheep driven to huge holes in the ground for burial. Joel states; "Even the flocks of sheep suffer your punishment!" (Joel 1:18) We have seen massive areas of England being flooded, rending thousands of homes uninhabitable. I could go on, but I am sure you understand where I come from in my thinking.

Spiritual Famine In The land - Two Minor Prophets Bring a Major Message

There is a very poignant portion of Scripture found in Amos 8:11: "Behold, the days are coming" says the Lord "That I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea and from the north to the east; they shall run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord, but shall not find it."

Joel also speaks a crisp, sharp, and powerful prophetic declaration to the southern tribes of Israel. He is also very precise as to where the famine is really located "The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord!" (Joel 1:9) He continues, "The vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered...all the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men!" (Joel 1:12) Oh, hear Joel's urgent cry; "Gird yourselves and lament you priests, wail you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth you who minister to my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God!" (Joel 1:13) Verse 16 is an echo of what Jeremiah has spoken would be removed from God's people; "Is not the food cut off before your eyes? Joy and gladness from the house of our God!"

What a clear description of spiritual famine. Amos, the farmer turned prophet, lashes out at the greed and injustice which was festering in his time. Coupled to that was the hypocritical religious motions that had replaced true worship. Famine, drought, plagues, death and destruction – nothing could bring the people to their knees in repentance. Five times in his book we read the phrase; "...Yet you have not returned to me" – says the Lord. A further eight times we also read; "I will not turn away its punishment." Amos would not be a popular choice of speaker in many religious conventions of our land today and Jeremiah would also join him in being marginalised!

To say the least, Jeremiah's declaration of impending judgement was not received too well: There was conflict with the nation who called for his execution (26:1-24), a further clash with a group of false prophets (27:1-22) - and yet more with a very popular prophet called Hananiah (28:1-17).

Hananiah prophesied what the people wanted to hear, bringing the 'positive' message; he certainly never spoke of judgement as a consequence of sin. The people would flock to hear his exciting preaching, his message bringing them to their feet in applause! Yet the awful truth was; the people believed a lie – a very convincing lie, but nevertheless one which would bring them into judgement and ultimately cost Hananiah his life (28:16-17).

Hananiah Is 'Still Alive' Today!

There is certainly no shortage today of preachers that have taken up the baton of Hananiah. They are popular speakers who command a following of thousands, but their preaching, though exciting and sometimes plausible, is "another Gospel" that the Apostle Paul warned would come: "For I know this that, after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves..." (Acts 20:29-31)

Their preaching and teachings are often centralised on financial prosperity. They are very skilled in placing a guilt complex (one of the worst forms of spiritual abuse) on those who do not support them financially - one big name even pronounces curses on those who do not open their wallets! Yet their popularity flourishes as thousands of beguiled believers flock to take in their teaching. I dread to think what the reaction of the Apostle Paul would be if he saw what has been done to the Church of God today.

"Christ led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men". (Eph.4:8) but what have we done to those gifts? We have turned them into a multi-million pound making industry! We have turned praise and worship into copyrighted material, so if you want to sing it you have to pay for it! Some of these 'teachers' even fly about in their personal jets. Hananiah would be a very popular prophet today! As a result of all this, no longer can the Church say "Silver and gold have I none", but neither can we say "In the Name of Jesus rise up and walk!"

The State of the Nation Reflects the State of the Church

Things are certainly not all doom and gloom, for there are people who are waking up and realise we cannot go like this. Our nation is suffering and is showing signs that we are not walking as we should. The book of Judges stands out in stark contrast to that of Joshua where an obedient people conquered the land. In Judges however, a disobedient and idolatrous people are defeated time and time again. Someone once said; "Religious apostasy and social and moral depravity will always be found going hand-in-hand together."

The crying heart of God over the idolatry of Judah is the pulse that throbs in the book of Jeremiah. God calls and pleads through this very sensitive prophet for Judah to return to Him.

Not too many years ago God was sending many Godly preachers of the Word with a ministry of repentance to the church. The burden of my preaching was also taking the same ministry and I experienced a mighty move of God one night at a church in Blackpool after preaching on this subject - we did not come out of the church until nearly midnight. Yes, God was calling us to return. Shocking as it may sound, at one service where I brought the Word, I actually heard one Pastor sitting behind me on the platform say "Oh no, not repentance again!"

A verse of Scripture which spoke to me very strongly some years ago is found in Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

One vital principle of God found in Scripture is the fact that He gives time for repentance and that principle is prominent in the book of Jeremiah. The prophet's ministry spanned nearly forty years as he pleaded with Judah. Just listen to the aching heart of God: "What injustice have your fathers found in me, that they have gone far from me and followed idols?" (Jer.2:5). "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns; broken cisterns that can hold no water." (2:13)

I could go on, but please allow me to give you just one more short reading; "Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people, and go from them..." (9:1-2). Can you feel the pain? If a prophet is anything, he is a man who reflects the heart of God and Jeremiah's preaching did just that. Jeremiah was the weeping prophet because God was crying also!

When I read the parable of the prodigal son that is mistakenly used as a Gospel message, I don't see a wandering, lost sinner whom God is calling to Himself: No, I see the church that has lost her way.

I hear the prosperity teachers say; "Let's claim our inheritance; it's ours!" Like the prodigal son, "Give me what is mine." Luke 15:12. But guess what brought him to his senses? "A severe famine in the land!" (Luke 15:14) That worked for him!

Today, there is an honest confession among God's people because of the realisation that we are not walking as we should.

ould, and it is time to seek the Lord. There is a longing for the return of the Glory of God in the midst of the church. “There is a cloud as small as a man’s hand” reported the servant of Elijah. (1 Kings 18:44)

Take heart people of God; for He is not in the habit of failing - the rain is on its way!

Re: A cry For Revival by Yorrie Richards - posted by Know-Him, on: 2011/5/25 2:35

A timely cry of the heart, thank you.

Re: , on: 2011/5/25 13:34

your welcome

Re: A cry For Revival by Yorrie Richards - posted by ThyKingCome (), on: 2011/5/25 14:14

I feel like brother Yorrie put my heart on paper. Thank God!