
A Fire in My Bones

By David Wilkerson

May 31, 2004 In Jeremiah 19, God gave his prophet a word to speak to Israel. Then he sent him into the temple court to prophesy. Jeremiah spoke these words: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words" (Jeremiah 19:15).

Pashur was chief governor of the temple at the time. And he was incensed by Jeremiah's words. Immediately, he flew into a rage and struck the prophet. Then he called forth his hirelings to lock up Jeremiah in stocks. He was to be placed at the city gate, where he would be humiliated for all to see.

The stock was an instrument of torture. And Jeremiah would be in constant pain for a full twenty-four hours. First, his head was locked into position. Then his body was contorted, with his arms locked crosswise. He would have to remain in that torturous position for a night and a day.

What a horrifying scene. Remember, Jeremiah was an anointed prophet of the Lord. He'd known from his youth that he was called to speak God's Word to his chosen people. But now Jeremiah was bound up and tortured for doing just that.

Yet, in spite of his suffering, Jeremiah never doubted his calling. He knew the Word he'd been given from God. And it had been that way from the very beginning of his ministry.

The Lord himself had testified of his relationship with Jeremiah: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee to be a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). God was saying, in essence, "I knew you before the earth was created, Jeremiah. I had a plan for your life even then. I created you to preach my Word."

At first, Jeremiah responded, "Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak: for I am a child." But God answered, "Say not, I am a child" (1:6-7). In other words: "I have called you, Jeremiah. So, don't say you're not able to do it."

Then the Lord added, "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee" (1:7-8).

At that point, Jeremiah tells us, "The Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (1:9).

What an incredible moment in Jeremiah's life. How wonderful to know that God has put his hand on you, revealed to you his thoughts, and anointed you to speak for him. Here was why Jeremiah never doubted the words God gave him.

Then the Lord gave Jeremiah this marching order: "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" (1:17).

Finally, God spoke this powerful word to his servant: "Behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall

fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee" (1:18-19).

Consider the awesome message God gave this man. He was saying, "Jeremiah, I planned a ministry for you in eternity. And now I'm sending you forth to root out all of Satan's lies. I want you to tear down every idol and destroy them before my people. And you're to build up my church as well. I want you to plant seeds of my good news. Don't worry, I'll give you every word to speak, just when you need it.

"But don't ever be afraid of men. Don't fear their frowns or threats. And never be afraid of failure. Remember, as long as you live, I am with you. No demon or enemy can touch you. Therefore, you're not to be discouraged. So, rise up in faith now, and do as I have commanded you. You have one divine purpose, and that is to speak my mind. Don't let anyone or anything break you down."

The Lord then added this final word: "Lest I confound thee before them" (1:17).

Beloved, here is God's message not only to Jeremiah, but to every pastor and Christian worker who has ever been called by him. He's telling us, "Don't let anybody break you down! There is no reason for you to despair. There's no cause for you to be confused before men. I've told you I am with you. I have said you're an impregnable fortress. So, there's no reason for burnout, no cause for you to quit.

"If you don't believe what I've told you — if you doubt my faithfulness to you — then you can't help but flame out. You'll end up bitter and worn out, and you'll quit. And you'll be confounded before everyone who opposes you. But it will be because you didn't trust in my Word to you.

"I tell you, it doesn't matter what hardships you face. It doesn't matter how badly people treat or abuse you. Your friends, your family, even princes or kings may turn against you. But they will never prevail. I have put brass walls and mighty pillars surrounding you. I am with you, to deliver you!"

This message is for everyone who, like Jeremiah, has been called from before creation to serve Christ. The apostle Paul says of God, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

Simply put, every person who is "in Christ" is called by the Lord. And we all have the same mandate: to hear God's voice, to proclaim his Word, to never fear man, and to trust the Lord in the face of every conceivable trial.

Indeed, what God promised Jeremiah applies to all of his servants. That is, we don't need to have a message prepared to speak before the world. He has pledged to fill our mouths with his Word, at the exact moment it's needed. But that will happen only if we trust him.

Paul tells us that many are appointed as preachers, teachers and apostles, and that they're all going to suffer for that reason. He counts himself among those: "I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things" (2 Timothy 1:11-12). He was saying, in short, "God has given me a holy work to do. And because I have that calling, I'm going to suffer."

Scripture shows that Paul was tested as few ministers ever have been. Satan tried to kill him time

after time. The so-called religious crowd rejected and ridiculed him. At times even those who supported him left him abused and forsaken.

But Paul was never confounded before men. He was never dismayed or put to shame before the world. And Paul never did burn out. On every occasion, he had an anointed word to speak from God, just when it was needed.

The fact is, Paul simply wouldn't be shaken. He never did lose his trust in the Lord. Instead, he testified, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). Simply put: "I have committed my life fully to the Lord's faithfulness. Live or die, I am his." And he urged his young charge Timothy to do likewise: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (1:13).

Just this past week, I gave the same advice to a pastor. This man had just quit his church. He felt he'd failed, because he wasn't winning any converts or growing his people into mature believers.

His wife agonized as she watched her husband fall into deep despair. She said, "He's a godly, caring man who prays faithfully for his people. But he got discouraged because he wasn't giving birth to any spiritual children. His preaching is anointed, but the people just didn't want to hear it. He felt there was nothing left to do but quit."

I made sure I sent this man Paul's encouragement. I urged him to hold fast to his faith and to the word he'd been given. God would be faithful to perform all that he promised.

Jeremiah came to his low point while in the stocks. It wasn't just Jeremiah's body that was being twisted. His soul was under attack. It was a dark, torturous night for this devoted, caring man.

Finally, after twenty-four hours of pain and humiliation, Jeremiah was released. He went straight to Pashur, the man who had locked him up. And he prophesied, "The Lord has a new name for you, Pashur. It means, 'You're going to live in constant dread and fear the rest of your days.'" You see, Jeremiah knew how dangerous it is for anyone to touch God's anointed. Outraged, Pashur merely called the prophet a liar.

By now, Jeremiah had reached the end of his endurance. And he began using the language of a burned-out servant: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me" (Jeremiah 20:7). The Hebrew word for "deceived" here means to open up. Jeremiah was saying, in short, "Lord, you've exposed me to a great delusion. I ended up a minister who's been completely deceived."

We can't sugar-coat what Jeremiah is accusing God of doing here. He's saying, "Lord, you called me to preach your Word. You told me to prophesy, to tear down and build up. You put a hard, difficult word in my mouth. But then, when I spoke it, you forsook me.

"I don't understand. I obeyed you, Lord. I was faithful. I didn't sin against you. In fact, I laid my very life on the line for you. And what did I get? Delusion, deception, abandonment and abuse."

Try to imagine what went through this man's mind during those twenty-four hours of torture: "I preached mercy to all these people passing by. But now all they do is abuse me. Lord, I spoke to them

as your oracle. I begged them to turn to you. I told them you would heal and bless them. But they're turned on me with utter viciousness.

"I wept for days over these men and women. My heart broke for them. I even grieved over their sins. My insides were moved with compassion for them. But now they're all mocking me. They deride me daily. God, you've put me in a living hell. The very word you gave me has become a reproach to me" (see Jeremiah 20:7-8).

You may wonder: "God promised Jeremiah he would never be put to shame. But isn't that what's happening here?"

I assure you, God's servant wasn't being put to shame. On the contrary, the Lord was doing something mighty in the land, and it would only be revealed in his time. He was going to show the nation that Jeremiah wasn't confounded before any man. Instead, Jeremiah would be a testimony. And it would remain so through the ages.

I receive letters from pastors around the world who feel the same way Jeremiah did. One minister wrote to me, "I feel so defeated. I was faithful to do everything God asked of me. But when I stepped out in faith, he left me hanging out to dry."

I have a young missionary friend who has just left his post. He entered the ministry with high expectations, but now he's leaving it burned out. He had a great burden for souls, and he labored diligently. But after several years, he still hadn't seen any meaningful results. He was never accepted by the people he worked among. His children were abused by the local children. And his wife grew weary and discouraged.

This man loves the Lord deeply. He's a precious servant of Jesus. But finally, he'd had enough. He told me, "Brother David, I feel like such a failure. I had hoped for so much. But none of it ever came to pass."

Each year, a growing number of missionaries go through the same thing. They're getting discouraged, quitting and coming home. They may not speak as rashly as Jeremiah did, accusing God of deceiving them. But deep inside, they hold a grudge against the Lord. They feel he led them in a certain direction but then let them down.

Another precious missionary wrote to our ministry about quitting his post. He explained, "I felt as if God had brought me into a wilderness and then left me twisting in the wind. He exposed me to my enemies, then forsook me. I left the ministry in utter dismay. And I failed the test of brokenness miserably. I became bitter.

"I see now what my problem was. I didn't put down any roots of trust during my testing time. When the trials began, I didn't rely on what I knew of God's Word and his faithfulness. I forgot his promise, 'I will never fail you.'"

I know what it's like to go through this kind of trial. Some fifteen years ago, when Times Square Church was just beginning, Satan tried to shipwreck our ministry and destroy the church. There were incredible accusations of racial strife, and personal attacks on my family and me. Many young people's minds were poisoned by the gossip that went on. Some came to me after our services and asked, "Are you really a phony, as I've heard?"

To this day, it still hurts to read my journals from that time. I began to hate Sunday mornings, when I had to preach. Often I sat in my den and wept, until my wife, Gwen, put her arms around me and said, "David, it's time to go."

I cried for weeks over the hurt of it all. Finally, I told Gwen, "I don't need this. Why don't I just go back to writing books and evangelizing?" All she could do was shake her head and say, "How can some Christians be so cruel?"

Of course, I didn't quit. And I never will. Why? For the same reason that Jeremiah couldn't quit. It's the reason other ministers and Christian workers can't quit: "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay [quit]" (Jeremiah 20:9).

God didn't rebuke Jeremiah for his tirade. In Jeremiah 20:14-18, the prophet let loose with a tirade that sounds near-suicidal:

"Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee...and let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not...because he slew me not from the womb...Where-fore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"

I heard this same despair in the voice of a minister who phoned recently. He told me, "David, I've grieved the Lord deeply. I'm so downcast from my failure, I'm empty, with nothing left. I feel like life isn't worth living anymore."

So many of God's servants in Scripture voice the same feelings. When Job was deep in his thickest darkness, a voice urged him, "Give up on God, and die." Elijah heard a similar voice. And the once-mighty prophet ended up begging, "Lord, take my life. I'm a failure, like all of my fathers."

Maybe right now you feel as they all did. You've been twisted and contorted by the enemy, with your head locked in a stock. You think, "I've cried out day and night, but my prayers aren't answered. I can't go through this anymore. I don't need it in my life. Things were easier when I was in the world, before I ever knew God. He has left me hanging."

Now, some Christians may respond, "All such talk is against the Lord. It calls for a stern rebuke." But the truth is, we're only able to consider the outward man. God sees through to the heart. And he knew Jeremiah's inward parts. He chose not to rebuke the despairing prophet. Why?

The Lord knew a fire still burned in this man. It was as if God said, "Jeremiah won't quit. Yes, he'll let off steam as he vents his confusion. But he still believes my Word. It's burning in his soul. And he's going to come out of this fire with a faith that can't be shaken."

"I know my servant can't help but preach my Word. I've stamped it on his soul, his heart, his mind. And his best days are ahead of him. He is still my chosen servant."

Jeremiah did get a second wind. Suddenly, he was filled with new life. And he rose up as if to say, "Hold on, Satan — you can't deceive me. You're not going to chase me out of this ministry God gave me. The Lord called me, and I know his Word is sure."

The prophet then testified, "I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side... All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail... Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers" (Jeremiah 20:10-11, 13).

Maybe right now you think your fire has died out. You're convinced there's no spark left. Perhaps it was sin that put the fire out. You got hooked, and little by little your fire diminished. I've listened to the tragic stories of godly men and women who were brought to ruin by the Internet. For most of the men, the seduction was pornography. For women, it was meeting a man in a chat room and beginning an affair.

Sadly, much of Christ's body today resembles a modern-day Valley of Dry Bones. It's a wilderness filled with the bleached skeletons of fallen Christians. Ministers and other devoted believers have flamed out because of a besetting sin. And now they're filled with shame, hiding out in caves of their own making. Like Jeremiah, they've convinced themselves, "I will not make mention of (the Lord), nor speak any more in his name" (Jeremiah 20:9).

God is still asking the same question he asked Ezekiel: "Can these dead bones live again?" The answer to this question is an absolute, "Yes!" How? It happens by the renewing of our faith in God's Word.

The Word of the Lord is itself a consuming fire. Indeed, it's the only true light we have during our dark nights of despair. It's our only defense against the enemy's lies, when he whispers, "It's all over. You've lost the fire. And you're never going to get it back."

The only thing that will bring us out of our darkness is faith. And faith comes by hearing God's Word. We simply have to cling to the Word that has been implanted in us. The Lord has promised, "I will not let you go down. Therefore, you have no reason to despair. There's no cause for quitting. Rest in my Word."

You may think, "But this dark night is worse than anything I've ever known. I've heard a thousand sermons on God's Word, but none of it seems of any value to me now."

Don't fret. God's fire still burns in you, even if you can't see it. And you're to pour onto that fire the fuel of faith. You do this by simply trusting the Lord. When you do, you'll see all your doubts and lusts consumed.

All around, I see a massive falling away from God's Word. Yet, in spite of this, I also see God doing a glorious work of restoring his people. He's going after every soldier who has been wounded or fallen. He knows those who have deserted. And he still loves them. Indeed, he's speaking to everyone who ever enlisted in his army. And he's urging them to return to their original calling.

God's Spirit is breathing life again into every set of dry bones. He's reminding them of the Word he implanted in them. And those who once lay dead are being revived. They're crying as Jeremiah did, "God's fire has been shut up in me for too long. I simply can't hold it in any longer. I can feel the Lord's power raising me up. He's putting life in me. And I'm going to speak the Word he gave me. I'm going to proclaim his mercy and healing power."

Isaiah gives us all the proof we need of God's desire and willingness to restore his fallen servants:

"I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.

"I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him" (Isaiah 57:16-19).

The Psalmist writes, "The Lord doth build up Jereusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psalm 147:2-3).

Dear saint, I don't know what your specific battle is. You may be in the midst of the darkest night you've ever known. The heavens may seem as brass to your prayers.

But I do know this: God has put a fire in your bones. And that fire still burns. There may only be a tiny spark left. But the Holy Spirit is blowing his breath on it. He is faithful to rekindle the flame in you. He's raising you up, to restore you to your original calling. And he will see you through every dark night.

Don't let the devil break you down!

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