

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Chapel, Clapham, on
Wednesday 29th October 1952.

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: "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.

The record of this chapter brings us to the verge of the time when the children of Israel were taken into captivity, and the city was burned with fire. And when this was pending, the King sent messengers unto Jeremiah, saying, "Pray now unto the Lord God for us." The King with the princes and the people had despised the word of the Lord through His servant. They had resented the faithful admonition of Jeremiah and rejected his testimony and his prophecy concerning what would come upon the land. And Jeremiah delivering the word faithfully from the Lord was persecuted and for a time he went away from the city, and was apprehended as a deserter and brought back and thrown into a dungeon. Then the King sent for him and had him brought out and enquired of him words: "Is there any word from the Lord?" And Jeremiah said, "There is." Indeed in this case it was an exceedingly solemn word. For it was that they should be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon which indeed came to pass.

I have thought a little about this King Zedekiah sending his men unto Jeremiah, saying, "Pray now unto the Lord for us." There are some people who, while there is nothing the matter, have no desire to pray, or for anyone to pray for them, but when trouble comes upon them then they would have some one to pray for them, to seek unto the Lord for them. They would follow their own ways, go after their gods, but would make what might be termed a tool of the Lord's servants to pray for them when they were threatened with trouble and affliction. There may be no grace in this whatever. It reminds me of a minister sent to see a person who said: 'Will you pray for me?' And he said, 'You must pray for yourself.' He knew the character of the person he addressed. So it is with some who make use of a servant of God just for their own deliverance while as yet they have no heart for God nor care for His ways. Zedekiah did not say, 'Bring Jeremiah that he may pray with me', but "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us". There is no evidence of any real repentance here in the case of the King or the princes. That would have been a different consideration altogether. How many people there are who assume that just to pray at the end of their days would put everything right! That is a delusive temptation of the devil. It is a mercy when we are brought to feel the need of prayer and to have a repenting spirit before the Lord for our sins and transgressions and to seek unto Him.

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Jeremiah gave the King some good advice and told him that if he would go forth unto the Chaldeans, his life would be spared, that is to say, if they would surrender, seeing this was the Lord's judgment upon them for their wickedness. But although he sought counsel of Jeremiah yet he would not follow that counsel because it was not according to his own mind. How often that has been the case even with good people who have sought counsel of others, but have not followed that counsel because it has not been acceptable to their own mind.

Jeremiah was faithful to King Zedekiah whatever the cost might be. We read that it all came to pass. The city was burned with fire, and the people were carried away by the Chaldeans, and Zedekiah, who would not heed the words of Jeremiah, and who tried to escape by a back way, was taken and his sons put to death before his eyes and he had both eyes put out and he was bound hard and fast in chains and eventually put to death. How solemn are all these things! So we have to see in the Scripture how in some instances these rebellious people and kings would ask counsel through God's servants, and yet defy that counsel notwithstanding. What a mercy it is when grace is given to fall under the word of the Lord to us whatever that word may be! I know there are some people, and I believe they are gracious people, who seem to be continually having words from the Lord for certain purposes, but you will find that those words are words that fall into line more or less with their own desires and wishes, to confirm them in their own matters; not always, but often it is so. I believe that, generally speaking, the Lord's exercised people do not get words from the Lord at every bend in the street. It is not often even in their lives that they really, definitely, and clearly hear the word of the Lord in this way.

Here were some trying circumstances, yet Jeremiah remained faithful to his commission, and when he spoke that which the Lord had given him it was resented, and he had to suffer in a filthy dungeon for it, and if it had not been for the the kindness of an Ethiopian, he would have died. But this black man, having a tender regard for the Lord's servant, obtained permission to bring him up out of the dungeon. So he was brought out. Old rotten rags were fastened together and fixed under the armholes of the prophet, and he was drawn up out of the dungeon. It is remarkable to see how the Lord preserved his servant in those very trying days. But nothing would move him in the slightest degree from that which he had received of the Lord concerning the King and concerning the people.

So when King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought into the house secretly, because of the princes who were bitter in their spirit against the Lord's servant, he said to him, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

hoping of course it might be a word favourable to him. It was not, because this King had not cared for God nor had he any desire to walk in His ways nor was he repentant in spirit for his wickedness. But because he would have a word from the Lord just to confirm him in what he wanted to do, Jeremiah said, "THERE IS." Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon." So we have to see by Scripture there has been a word from the Lord sometimes to wicked people who have had no part or interest in the blessings of His grace. They have had no love toward Him nor any care for His word or laws. It was a very solemn word that the Lord had to speak unto this King, yet even so there was a word from the Lord to him through Jeremiah which, if he had regarded it in a right way, his life could have been spared and it would have been well with him though he would have been taken into captivity.

How solemn are these considerations! We have to see in Scripture that there have been many instances where people have had a word from the Lord and in some cases a very solemn, reprovng word. At other times it has been a very comforting and very confirming word. Sometimes it has been a directing word or a commanding word. So it was when the word of the Lord came to Abraham, saying to him Get up out of Ur of the Chaldeans and go forth into a place that I shall show thee. It was a word from the Lord to him to go forth unto a place that afterward should be a land where his seed should dwell, and this was accompanied by a promise unto him - a great blessing in his seed. So in the case of Jacob at Bethel. There was a word from the Lord to him in time of great necessity assuring him that the Lord would not forsake him but that He would be with him and would keep him in all places whither he went, and would bring him again into this land and would not leave him until he had done that which He had spoken to him of. And whenever a word from the Lord has come to a person (man, woman, or child) always we have to see that the Lord fulfilled it, and that too in a way that should be for His own glory. In the case of Samuel, although but a child, there was a word from the Lord to him. Indeed that was also a very solemn word, although not so far as Samuel himself was concerned. But it was a solemn word in relation to the sons of Eli who were wicked priests. It was a word foretelling death to them and to Eli himself, which the Lord brought to pass in a solemn way.

So we see in the Scriptures in the case of the Lord's people that a word from the Lord came to them and it came to them in such a way that they could not doubt where it came from. I do not know if that has been the case with you. Yet, even in these days we may still believe there is at times a word from the Lord to men concerning certain things which, though

it is a great mystery, is none the less a solemn reality, for God does still speak to them. If we follow on in the Scriptures we can see how that word from the Lord came to the Judges whom he raised up on certain occasions as for example to Gideon and others. Also to the prophets and some of the Kings the word of the Lord came in a very particular way. Sometimes it was in a way of reproof, as it did to the Lord's servant Elijah after he had fled from the threats of Jezebel into the wilderness. The word of the Lord came to him there saying, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" It was repeated to him again when he was on the mount of the Lord. So it was even with the later prophets, we have to find there was a word from the Lord to them which was sometimes to confirm them in the face of all their difficulties and the opposition that they had to encounter in the discharge of their office. It was so in the case of Jeremiah himself when the Lord called him to be a prophet and said unto him, "Before thou was born I ordained thee and sanctified thee to be a prophet to the nations. Now therefore be not afraid of their faces lest I confound thee before them. I will be with thee and make thee a brazen wall unto them. Though they will withstand thee be not afraid of them. I will be with thee."

In the New Testament we find there was a word from the Lord to different ones, as in the case of Philip directing him down into the desert where, in the providence of God, he would meet a Eunuch whom he was to baptise. Was there not a word to Saul when he was on the way to Damascus? He heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Also the Lord appeared to John when he was on the Isle of Patmos and spoke to him saying, "Fear not, I am the First and the Last." So that we can confidently believe that many have had a word from the Lord to them in certain particular things in their life as well as in the experience of their souls.

The point I want to bring home is: Has there been a word from the Lord to you? Has there been a word from the Lord to me? The word of the Lord to these good men in the primitive days may be of much concern to us, because no Scripture is of private interpretation. What I mean is: the word of the Lord to him, to them, can indeed come to you. Because the Spirit of the Lord can take that word whether spoken to Abraham, Jacob, or Moses or whoever it may be, and can speak that word to you. There may not be any word in particular now. In fact, it may be that with some of you the Lord has been silent for a long season. If that be so, it should be an occasion of great exercise, and would it be pertinent to put such a question as this and ask if it is a long time since you had any word from the Lord?

This word "ANY" is a striking word. "Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, "There is." How does this matter stand with us? Would we have to go back days, weeks, months, or, shall I say years since there has been any - any - word from the Lord? Has there been any word at all? Has there been any word from the Lord to you? In this matter I appeal to your consciences and to mine for some searching of heart concerning the Lord's silence, and how we may be affected by that silence.

"Is there any word from the Lord?" Has there been any word lately? I will put this in another way: Have any come to the service tonight longing for a word from the Lord.

This word ANY arrests my mind. "Is there any word?" Not "A" word, but "Is there any word from the Lord?" As though a child of God would say, 'Lord, whatever that word is, may I be enabled to receive it and fall under it.' We must not always expect a word from the Lord to please our nature or our flesh or which may seem (as far as we conclude) right and acceptable in the Lord's sight. Not necessarily so, my friends. We read of David who would have built a temple for the worship of God, which was a most admirable desire. Nothing could be said against it. In fact, Nathan commended him and said, "Do all that is in thine heart, David." What could he do better than this? But there was a word from the Lord Himself through the prophet Nathan that he was not to do this, although the Lord commended the desire of his heart. So I believe we must soberly conclude that though it is a great mercy to receive a word from the Lord, we must not always expect that word to fall into line with what we have set out, designed, or planned in our minds.

"Is there any word from the Lord?" Is there faith in the heart to say, 'Lord, if that word be such as to overturn and bring to naught any design or plan that I had in my mind, then may I have grace to receive it.' This is a great thing. I believe that though the Lord will always deal faithfully with His people, yet at times he may deal solemnly even in their circumstances, but it will always be in mercy to them in His purpose. Moreover, he will cause the things that may seem to work against them to work for their good.

"Is there any word from the Lord?" Let us go back a little in consideration of this. Has there ever been a word from the Lord? Has there ever been any word from the Lord? If we should have to say honestly, "There has never been any word from the Lord", then we are in a very solemn case - at present. For we must realise that it is a very solemn consideration to have lived all these years more or less in profession and yet never to have had any word from the Lord. But I do not say this to cut any one off, because I believe there are living souls who may greatly fear whether

they have received any word from the Lord. Yet I say, if you are a living soul, then you have received some word from the Lord otherwise you could not be a living soul.

Has there ever been a quickenning word? The Apostle Peter says: "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." Can we go back to a certain time in our life when there was a word from the Lord that brought conviction into our conscience and brought us to feel that we were sinners in the sight of God? Perhaps you say, 'Well, I could not say that there had been any word from the Lord, but I know that there was a gradual change in me, and the things I once delighted in had a death come upon them, and I was shown what I was, where I stood, and constrained to try and pray and seek mercy.' Well then, you have had a word from the Lord. "But I do not remember hearing any word." That may be. I believe the Lord's people do hear words - not audible but by the Spirit of the Lord - in His operations in the heart and conscience. Sometimes it is a convicting word in your conscience which discovered to you that you were full of sin, and that brought you to see your personal need.

Has there been a reproving word? Have there been times when you have been bent upon taking a certain course, walking in a certain path, or turning this or that way, or making some change, when a word from the Lord has stopped you? That is to say, when something has been brought into the heart with power that has so affected you that you dare not go any further in the matter because of the reproof that you got in your heart or conscience concerning it. Some of the Lord's people have had cause to thank Him greatly for hedging up their way. Those very same people have had cause to thank Him for shutting up their way, and for giving them a directing word, as well as a reproving word. Some have had to see the Lord stop up one way to open another.

We have to remember in these days the word of the Lord comes by His Spirit in the heart by the influence or power and effect of a Scripture applied to the heart and conscience in a particular way. This can be very distinct. You may be walking down a street, or you may be in the Underground and a word from the Lord may come to you in a moment, and have a wonderful effect upon your spirit - a remarkable effect. Perhaps you say, 'Well it never has with me. I do not feel I have ever had a word from the Lord.' That does not mean you never will, and besides, you may have lost sight of it for a moment.

"Is there any word from the Lord?" Has there been a confirming word from the Lord in your heart by the way; a promise that has been consoling,

comforting, and confirming to your spirit in a time of affliction, distress, or trouble? The word of the Lord does come to his people in a distinct way more or less. Has a word come like this: "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and formed thee O Israel, fear not, I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by name, thou art mine." 'O!' say you, 'I would not dare say such a thing.' But you may have a wonderful surprise one day.

"There is a word from the Lord," Jeremiah said. So may we not say, "There is a word from the Lord." There is a word from the Lord to sensible, needy sinners who feel their guilt and their ruin. But what is needed is for the Lord to bring that word with authority into the heart. There is a word from the Lord to seeking souls, for He has said, "I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me."

There is a word from the Lord to those who wait upon Him with all their heart, for He has said, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Him". 'O! but' you say, 'A word has not come home to me.' No, but wait on the Lord, and one day you may find such a word take hold of you in such a way as to raise you up to a hope in Him, yet you would hardly dare lay claim to it. What you need is for the Lord to come and seal it beyond doubt in your heart. Then you can believe it.

"Is there any word?" There is a word from the Lord to all coming sinners, a wonderful word to all such. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." 'O!' say you, 'that is only in Scripture,' I quite agree with you. It is in the Scripture, and you cannot just read it and take comfort from it as you dispose, but one day - or night it may be - you may feel a word from the Lord steal softly into your heart, and when you feel that stealing, as it were, like a small, still, voice into your soul, do not try and push it out, but open the arms of your faith and lay hold of it and go to the Lord with it and ask Him to confirm it. As to this, let me say, never despise any word from the Lord that may come, because it does not come as you feel with that great power and authority of which you have heard others speak. If there is any word from the Lord then open your heart for it and ask Him to bring it right in. O, to have any word of the Lord is wonderful! and to know that the Lord has "Thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you an expected end." Say you, 'I am waiting for a word from the Lord.' That is a good place to be in because if you are waiting for a word from the Lord, then the Lord is probably waiting with a word for you in His own good time. So it is in the Scriptures where we read, "The Lord waiteth that He may be gracious." He has something for you, and He has set the time when He will

bring that blessing into your soul. O, He may keep you waiting for it, and yet bless you in the very waiting too, while at other times you feel miserable in the waiting. But there is this: "Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious..... blessed are they that wait for Him." "Is there any word?" Some may say, 'Well the other day I was about my business and a word dropped in and it softened me, and what do you think? Why, I began to feel I could pray.' Yes, that is how you can tell whether it was a word from the Lord. When you get a word from the Lord, He opens the mercy seat to you, brings you near Himself with it.

Then again, as to our providences and things in our lives, what a great thing it is when there is a word from the Lord to settle the matter, so that you know what to do, whether to go forward or stay, whether to take the matter up or lay it down. If you get a word from the Lord in a matter, you can go in the strength of it. Take a word like this: "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more but thine eyes shall see thy teachers and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way walk ye in it".

"Is any there any word from the Lord?" and Jeremiah said, "There is." Is it not a great thing for us that there is a word from the Lord in mercy to a poor, repenting sinner? Amen.

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