

Jeremiah 1: 1-19; “I am Watching Over My Word”, Sermon # 1 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned For a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 19th, 2012, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

I hope to begin with this sermon a series of sermons drawn from the book of Jeremiah which I have entitled “Heart Lessons Learned for a prophet and the people of God”. They are given with the purpose of showing how God faithfully teaches His people to trust in Him, and to obey Him in times of great difficulty and apostasy. We are living in times of great spiritual declension, but these can be times of proving God’s faithfulness to His Word. For the Lord God watches over His Word. John Calvin translates verses 11 and 12 this way: “Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘What do you see Jeremiah?’ “And I said, the rod of a watcher is what I see.” “Then Jehovah said to me, ‘Thou has rightly seen, for I watch over My word to do it.’” He says in his commentary, “that God is intimating that the might and power of His hand would be connected with the Word, of which the prophets were ministers among men.” “Thus it is a declaration which refers, not only to punishments, but to promises.” And this is the proposition which I would have you to meditate upon and believe: That the Lord watches over His word to perform exactly what He determines that it will accomplish in men and among nations. The question that we will ask is this: What kind of a word is it that God is watching over? And I think that we can describe the Lord’s Word in the following 4 ways. 1st – It is a Preventive Word (Verses 4 and 5) 2nd – It is a Preparatory Word (Verses 6-10) 3rd- It is a Prophetic Word (Verses 11-16) And 4th – It is a Prevailing Word (Verses 17-19)

1st of all – The Lord’s Word is a Preventive Word.

I use this word preventive because it is a good old word. The old Puritans used to use the words “preventive grace” to describe the grace that goes before, or that which anticipates or precedes conversion to Christ. God’s grace in relation to all of His dear people goes before them in the appointing all the works that they will do in relation to their ministry and service to Christ. God says to Jeremiah through His Word – “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” “Before you were born I sanctified you. (I set you apart to all my holy purposes in your salvation and for the ministry that I would call you to.) “I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Ah, the high mystery of predestination and God’s divine foreknowledge and election! How carefully it must be handled; how reverently we must speak of it! God is before all things; He knows from eternity all of His works before there was even one of them. (Acts 15: 7) He knows all the persons that He will save from before the foundation of the world. He knew us there and the purpose for which He would create us. God conceived of each of us and knew us before He formed us in the womb. He plans it all, He brings it to pass in accordance with His

preventive Word. The preventive word is God's eternal purpose, the words of His Mind, His own heart declaring that He will save His people from their sins; that He will appoint men like Jeremiah and the Apostle Paul and many others to be prophets, apostles, teachers to His church, and preachers to those who have never heard. "Go," the Lord says to Ananias, concerning Saul of Tarsus, "for he is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake." God appoints such men by speaking a word, a preventive word which sets the course and the work of their lives.

Indeed, God appoints by His preventive word all His people's salvation, their gifts, and their ministry; doing all according to the counsel of His own will. Let us remember that there are many secret things which God appoints concerning us which are for our good; to conform us to the image of Christ if we are one of His Elect people. These things so come to pass that they sometimes perplex us and cause us to wonder at His preventive word. But let us learn to trust Him, to wait for Him to unfold our lives, and to sweetly rest in the things He orders for us; for they are for our good.

Father I know that all my life is portioned out for me; the changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to see: I ask Thee for a present mind, intent on pleasing Thee.

I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro, seeking for some great thing to do, or secret thing to know. I would be treated like a child and guided where I go.

I ask Thee for the daily strength, to none that ask denied, A mind to blend with outward life, while keeping at Thy side." "Content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified."

In service that Thy will appoints, there are no bonds for me; my secret heart is taught the truth that makes Thy children free. A life of self-renouncing love is one of liberty. (Ann L. Warring in 1850 Hymn # 444 in the Trinity Hymnal)

2nd – God's Word which He is watching over is also a Preparatory Word.

(verses 6-10)

It is a preparatory word because there are many things in the Christian life which we do not believe we can do. We love the Lord for His forgiving our sins but since we have been convinced of our sinfulness, we feel many inadequacies in ourselves. So God must convince us of these 2 things in our lives if we are to be useful to Him. The first is our own inadequacy and insufficiency for the task He

sets before us. The second is His sufficiency; that He makes and will make us adequate for the task. 2 Corinthians 3: 5 is a good example of this: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being (or coming) from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” What we think we cannot do; God knows can be done by His Spirit. Jeremiah says, “Ah Lord God!” “Behold I cannot speak, for I am a youth.” He is saying that he cannot be a prophet to the nations because he is too young and inexperienced. And it is true that when we are young we need to defer to men of more years and experience. Turn with me to Job 32: 6 and 7. It is the general good rule in great matters of speech that age should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom. And yet – When God’s Spirit prepares, when God’s Spirit equips, then we are adequate; we can speak. For Elihu goes on to say – “Great men are not always wise, nor do the aged understand justice.” Who would have thought that Job’s three friends could not answer Job’s arguments, but the younger Elihu did. And there is no mention of God’s anger being aroused by Elihu’s speech as it was against Eliphaz the Temanite and his two friends. They had not spoken of God what was right as Job had, it says in Job 42: 7. But Elihu was God’s faithful spokesman and he was the younger man. And so we see that God prepares His servants by His Word – “Do not say that I am a youth.” “For you shall go to all whom I send you.” “And whatever I command you, you shall speak.” You see how God is preparing Jeremiah by His giving him these words – “Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you.” I am sure that there were times when Jeremiah was afraid of men—their scowling faces and their harsh words, but this is where God’s word would come to his aid: “I am with you to deliver you.”

Do you have this confidence in God’s word; that His promises are true and that He is preparing you for what lies ahead – by His Word? Jeremiah had the preventive word and he had the preparatory word, but he had something else which is essential to salvation, and to all service for Him. He had a touch from God. (verse 9) “Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth”. The very area of concern and felt weakness is touched; His mouth. “Behold, I cannot speak.” The Lord touches his mouth – “Behold I have put my words in your mouth.” Have you brought your felt weakness and inadequacy to God? Perhaps you not only feel weak, but sinful, and so you are. But Jesus comes to touch us, to heal us, and to take away our feelings of inadequacy and self-sufficiency, and to let us know of His power which will work in us to help us to do his will. Then when we trust in God, and only in the strength of our Savior, He would use us in His service. He would have us to reach out to others and minister to them in His name. And we are afraid. But He says, “I am with you to deliver you.” Will you not pray that He will touch our souls and our lips with His power and grace? I believe that it was William Gouge who said, “When I look upon myself, I see nothing but

emptiness and weakness; but when I look upon Christ, I see nothing but fullness and sufficiency.” Listen to the benedictory prayer of the Apostle Paul for the Hebrews that he was writing to in Hebrews 13: 20 – “Now may the God peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.” “Amen”. It is Christ who makes us complete in every good work to do His will.

3rd – It is a Prophetic Word. (verses 11-16)

The second time which the word of Lord the came to Jeremiah was when He gave to him the vision of a boiling pot facing away from the north. This was a word of prophecy; that God was uttering His judgments against the cities of Judah and against Jerusalem. Jeremiah must be prepared to speak judgments as well as promises to God’s chosen people. He must speak them to the people of God as well as to the heathen nations. God’s prophetic word is often conveyed in picture language and here we have a good example. “What do you see Jeremiah?” And he says that he is seeing a boiling pot which represents Judah and Jerusalem who would be boiled away by God’s fierce anger in the execution of His judgments upon them through the calamity that would come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar and all the families of the kingdoms of the North would come and besiege them just as a piece of flesh was boiled and reduced to being almost nothing in the pot. God loves His people, and He will always be faithful to teach them His ways which are holy. He will be faithful to His threats and warnings as well as His promises of blessing.

The issue related to the prophetic word is obedience; whether people will hear and hearken to His Word to do what He has commanded. God is patient, but He will not wait indefinitely for the repentance and the obedience his professed people, or His true people. He comes looking for fruit amongst all men and nations and if, after a space, they do not repent, if there is no fruit, He will utter His judgments and they will be carried out. It is vitally important that each one of us here today awake and turn from our love of this world, our love of entertainment more than God, our love of sensual pleasure if we have it, our love of foolishness if this is what we find in ourselves, our neglect of God’s Word if this is our habit. If any of these things are ours, we should take private time to have serious dealings with God. For it is possible to wait too long to avoid either chastening if we are believers, or eternal judgment if we are unbelievers. Judgment of men and nations will ripen apace, and soon we shall face Christ on the brink of eternity. Are you ready for this my friend? God will chasten His people if they do not repent.

4th- The Word that God speaks is a Prevailing Word. (verses 17-19)

I’m sure that Jeremiah thought to himself in dismay – How can I bring God’s word to these people; people who are so opposed to me and my ministry? And no

doubt we at times think the same. How can God's word come with power to this generation – to the people who are lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control and the list goes on. God's word will come to them as a prevailing word as He did through Jeremiah words. He will come to people in this same way in our times as well. "They shall fight against you", God says to him, "but they shall not prevail, for I am with you to deliver you." This does not mean that when Christians are faithful to deliver God's word, that they will not be persecuted or martyred for their declarations of God's word. The history of the Church is replete with such. But it means that God will be with them either to deliver them from their persecutions in due time, and they will not die at that time, or He will be with them to deliver them through their sufferings and death, to come to be with Himself. In this particular case, God would be with Jeremiah to deliver him from dying a martyr's death during the time of his ministry. His word would prevail through Jeremiah's time of ministry, because God was watching over His word. He would make Jeremiah "a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land; the kings, the princes, the priests, and the people of the land." "They will fight against you", God says to him, "but they shall not prevail against you." If God is for us, and with us, who can stand against us? (Romans 8: 31) You and I as Christians must learn to speak of God's faithfulness to His Word, both in His promises, and in regard to His judgments, so that men and women and children might be saved. "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 11. God's Word shall prevail through His Church faithfully proclaiming it. I like the way that David prays in Psalm 3, in the time when he was fleeing from his son Absalom. "Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!" "Many are they who rise up against me." "Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head." "I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill." "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me." "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around." You see this is the kind of holy confidence which only comes from the Spirit of God helping us. I pray that you will bring all of your sins to the foot of Christ's cross, bring all of your fears of men and the outcome of your service to Christ to this promise which God gives to you and to me – "I am watching over My word to perform it.