

BACK TO THE OLD PATHS

By Samuel L. Brengle

God's prophets of old have kindled in me some of their flaming zeal for righteousness, their scorn of meanness, pride and worldliness, their jealousy for the living God; their fear of those who forget God and live as though He were not, their courage in denouncing sin, and calling men back to the old paths of righteousness.

I stand in awe as I note their intrepidity, their forgetfulness of self in denouncing sin and facing the contempt, the scorn, and then the wrath of princes, priests and kings. Tradition tells us Isaiah was finally thrust into a hollow log and "sawn asunder."

They counted not their lives dear unto themselves. They were "moved by the Holy Ghost." They yielded themselves up for service, suffering, or sacrifice as His instruments. They were surrendered men, selfless men, devoted as soldiers unto death, if needs be, that they might save the nation, and if not the nation, then a remnant who clung to the old paths, who would not bow the knee to Baal, who would not yield to the seductions of fashion and the spirit of the times.

They were men of the age, but they lived and wrought mightily for the Ages. They were men of the times, and their message was meant for their times; but it had timeless value because they lived in God and wrought for God and spoke only "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Going Forward Under Divine Constraint

They were different men by nature. They shrank from the prophetic office. They did not seek it. It was thrust upon them. God called them, and they went forward under divine constraint.

Listen to Jeremiah's story of his call: "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 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 a prophet unto the nations." But he shrank from the great task and its fearful responsibility and pleaded: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." "Say not, I am a child," said the Lord in reply, "for 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."

But God did not send him forth at his own charges and in his own strength. He never does so send His prophets. He equips them. He humbles them until there is no conceit or strength left in them, like Daniel in Babylon and John on Patmos, and they cry out, as did Isaiah: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts," and then He empowers them.

And as the Lord touched the lips of Isaiah with living fire, so He touched Jeremiah: "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." That was his equipment for his great and dangerous office. And, under God, it is ours also.

Shrinking From the Face of Men and Falling Before the Frown of God

Then the vastness of this man's mission was unfolded to him: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms—this

lad, who never left the land of his birth, except when dragged down to Egypt against his prophetic protest! "Set . . . over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out" the rank growth of evil, "to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down" every high and vicious thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God: "to build and to plant."

"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, . . . and speak unto them all that I command thee; be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them." It is a fearful thing to shrink in fear from the face of man and fall before the frown of God, but that was the alternative set before this young prophet. Speak boldly and feel the strength of the everlasting arms girding you about. Slink away from the face of man and be confounded by the Almighty!

A Thankless Task

It was not a joyous, rose-strewn path the prophets trod. It was perilous, lonely, blood-stained, ambushed by malignant foes, by entrenched monopolies of vested interests, confronted by established custom and the unquestioned practice of kings and princes, priests and people. He was to set himself in opposition to the nation and the nations. Oh, the loneliness of it! The danger! The thankless task! "For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee."

What a spectacle—a lone man, against the world! "And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

Ah, I see! He is not alone. They that be with him are more than all that are against him. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Hallelujah! The prophets were lone, diffident men, but they had access to God; the key to secret resources of exhaustless power and wisdom and grace was given them.

They were equipped with God—God the Holy Ghost. He moved them and they spoke, and their message reverberates through all time, judges all men and nations, and illuminates all history.

Many students of prophecy think the prophets have put into our hands a God-given telescope, through which we can peer into the future and foresee the course of all coming history to the utmost bounds of time, but they prepare elaborate charts and write no end of books and make learned mathematical calculations, and often fix dates for the end of all things, but I have never been helped, but rather confused, in trying so to interpret the great prophets.

Their value to me ever since God called me has appeared to consist not in the light they throw upon generations yet unborn, but the light they throw upon my own generation. I want help to interpret my own times. It is because their messages came from God and are timeless that they are so timely. Their prophecies are meant to enable me to understand the present, to recognize my own duty, to interpret the will and ways of God to the men of my own generation, and to guide the steps of the youth of the next generation, to fitness for their solemn, unknown tasks.

THE JOY OF BEING REMEMBERED

J. B. Chapman

Forty years ago I allowed a young college friend to persuade me to invade the home of a famous preacher and meet the great man in his own living room. The great man was more than cordial, and without a moment's hesitation invited me to make his house my home for any length of time and without charge or obligation. Outside I remarked to my friend that there must be a mistake somewhere. This famous man could not be that much interested in me, a poor beginner as a preacher, and no doubt the great man would be nonplussed if I should decide to accept his proffered hospitality and move into his home. But my friend insisted that the invitation was genuine, and that others had found it so.

I later came to know that famous preacher well. I saw him surrounded with a crowd of people. Without discrimination he received them all, small and great, and with ease and joy he recalled former meetings with a large number of them. I watched the people—especially the humble and lowly who were the honored guests. It was remarkable how well this famous preacher remembered, and I observed that he usually remembered instances in which those before him played the leading role. Perhaps it was the time when this certain man looked after the tent, or it was the time when this humble woman baked the biscuits for breakfast. But no matter about the circumstances, the great man remembered them, and that was what counted. I saw the wrinkled faces of old women shine with inner glow, and the stooped shoulders of humble laborers straighten visibly. There was everywhere the evidence of a new sense of personal worth—the great man had remembered them. The great man was Bud Robinson, who has since entered the pearly white city. He was a man of marvelous memory, especially to those whom he did not forget.

There is another also, who has assured us that our names are engraved on the palms of His hands. Our names are not simply written, but engraved. That means they are there to stay. Time cannot erase them, and He who bears them will not forget. His time of recollection gives the humblest man a sense of worth that makes him glad to be alive. And that smile of remembrance makes the humble one feel that he shall always live, and be happy forever more. It is a joy just to be remembered, especially when it is Jesus Christ himself who remembers me.

It is true, we cannot get much from God, or do much for God, until we believe His word with a strength which risks all upon it, and cannot but believe and act it out. Such convictions are the tap roots of character, and the man who possesses them never can be weak. When a man takes his Bible, and kneeling at its open page, has solemnly committed all his life and soul to its great promises and mighty commands without a single reservation, then his prayers and deeds will tell upon the world, and he can never be unimportant again.

—A. B. Simpson.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and bow not unto thine own understanding."

"Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."