

# God's ways in the life and work of ministers

## (Quality: Very good)

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     Those who were here this morning, perhaps in busage, that I should take the same subject that I dealt with this morning.
- I feel so often retrospectively that there was so much more to be said that I didn't say.
- And I certainly feel like that with respect to this morning's discourse. If I was left to myself, I would probably have given out the same text again this evening.
- Look, I've had two texts on my spirit and I felt under God's influence as I must turn from the subject this morning to the subject I'm going to now announce as the foundation of my remarks here this evening.
- You'll find that in the first chapter of Jeremiah. Verse 4 and following.
- [ 1 : 20 ]     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.
- Then said I, Our Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.
- But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child, 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, saith the Lord. We consider the Old Testament and realize that one of the largest portions of the Old Testament was given to Jeremiah to record the most difficult period in the history of the Lord's people.
- Everything, as it were, seeming to gather up together in a cloud of just condemnation, bringing forth the judgment of heaven upon an offending people.
- [ 3 : 04 ]     A people greatly favored among the nations of the earth, nevertheless turning from the God who made them what they were, and blessed them with unique blessings in many respects above the other nations of their generation, their time.
- And my friends, it's a great responsibility rested upon the shoulders of this prophet of this prophet of the Lord, Jeremiah, and how wonderful it was.
- God led him and used him and brought him as one of the leading instruments under his hand in the Old Testament record of the prophets that we read much instruction in those writings of Jeremiah that have been inspired, preserved, and maintained to us, which is a very, very great privilege.
- Well, now this evening, I want to, first of all, appreciate that Jeremiah was so prepared of God, even before he was born, before he saw the light of day.
- God had a very clear view of the work that he had ordained, even from all eternity, for this individual person to accomplish.
- [ 4 : 56 ]     You know, the sanctification of ministers under the power and purpose of the Most High God is a wonderful demonstration of God's sovereign overruling, even from the beginning to the end.

And some people may say even before the beginning, because how was Jeremiah's parents to realize what a son was being formed by the good hand of God to fulfill a purpose that would find its perfect expression.

even in the natural gifts and character of the man to be educated and built up by the sovereign goodness and mercy of the Lord.

ministers, and I say this in a context that I feel very concerned about personally.

You may say, well, this is self-defense, because I'm not a man of great education, a man of very simple, as it were, preparation from a scholarship point of view.

[ 6 : 43 ] I aspire to no great admiration in the way of my natural talents.

But my friends, God makes ministers. And only God makes ministers. They're a unique body upon whom the thoughts of God centered generation by generation, nation by nation, over the face of time.

Jeremiah was formed with this in context. Jeremiah was made in such a way by the molding, shaping hand of the Almighty, that he was exactly suitable to deliver the message or messages that God directed through his instrumentality.

God didn't come in, so to speak, in his life when his life was half expended. It was before he saw the light of day, the handiwork of God was operating in the womb of his mother.

And the various peculiarities of a person, distinct, unique, in the annals of God's purposes were taking form and shape.

[ 8 : 39 ] Oh, my friends, we can't send to universities and make men ministers of God in and of themselves.

I don't, for a minute, suggest that God in his purposes doesn't overrule and appoint that men should have university education.

if that is in the plan of God. But universities without the purpose of God underlying the instruction and sanctifying the opportunity and giving suitable talents, as it were, to use the benefits, I say, are of no value.

we are treating a subject this evening that's uniquely the handiwork of heaven.

And if so be, there is a boast, I don't hear, draw any lines, denominational characteristics or traditional influences, I'm not trying to undermine and overthrow any particular parts of education and preparation, I'm here to say that the making of a minister is God's work, God's work.

[ 10 : 22 ] And there can be more done by the overruling hand of God in a man's experience to equip him to preach the messages God ordains he shall preach than any length of time that he may sit under the instruction of a fellow person.

The Lord sends his word by whom he will. And there should be in the church of God and we must be jealous in this day when there's so much influence toward being prepared by men for the holding of certain influential positions and especially in spiritual things.

The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God that foolishness unto him neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned and spiritual teaching under the good hand of the spirit of God is the essential prerogative of heaven to prepare his servants to serve him.

One of God's preparatory works in his sovereign application to these principles is this.

He doesn't make a man self important. He doesn't make a man the ideal material.

[ 12 : 20 ] If they want anybody to minister well I'm the man to do it. Pride's got no place in pulpits. Pride is an abomination to the Lord and my friends a proud heart is a useless instrument indeed.

Now Jeremiah I am a child. The Lord brought him down to an awful sense I was going to say a mortifying sense of his insufficiency for the work that he ordained him to accomplish.

He didn't feed him with certain self appreciated importance or certain gifts that should be misused to the commendation of the instrument as opposed to the gracious sanctifying glorifying work of God in his being given to the church to minister in the Lord's name.

Oh my friends we must be jealous not to open the door as it were to those that consider themselves to be the ideal communicators we must appreciate that God can use the most humble instruments.

I remember when I was a boy we had an instrument come into the pulpit at Coventry his name was Charles James and he was a road sweeper in Wiltshire I don't think I ever listened as a boy to a more humble man in the in the pulpit he was well I say now perhaps I didn't judge quite the same when I was assessing the situation by my youthful measures but he was beautifully simple and beautifully humble he had six Sundays a year at Coventry and his ministry was highly esteemed but in some ways he stumbled a little in conveying his words in the king's

[ 15 : 27 ] English it was a very very elementary communication of the truth of God's word but God blessed him he once went to Swindon in the exercise of the ministry he had a good wife wise woman and he preached a sermon at Swindon in those bygone days and oh he came back home the same evening and they got into bed together and he was restless and he was restless into the early hours of the morning and she said to him Charles why don't you stop twisting and turning about I can't sleep so he said oh he said I've made such a poor job of preaching at Swindon this evening she said

I'll tell you what the answer is you've upset the devil he thought about that and it was a possibility and it brought comfort to his heart I believe I'm right in reporting this that under that sermon six people were led of the spirit of God to express their love for the Lord Jesus Christ in the ordinance of baptism six people under one sermon that the dear man was fighting against almost the lack of ability that had been exhibited in the conveyance of what God ordained he would use in and through and through the instrumentality of a simple discourse by a most humble and gracious instrument say not

I'm a child oh the Lord said to Jeremiah say not I'm a child and my friends some of us are still wrestling with this problem why do we not see the fruit that we long to save is it that our proud hearts are too hungry or is it that we're seeking the applause of our hearers rather than the glory of our God what a mercy when God really humbles us listen to the apostle

Paul that great eminent servant of the new testament who said of himself that he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees unto me am less than the least of all sin the less unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace giver it's the lowest instrument that carries the potential of the greatest fruitfulness because God is a jealous God he says I will not give my glory to another and I will not give my praise to graven images I'm jealous of my own glory and if I'm going to use an instrument I'm going to make him thoroughly humble that he's not looking to himself and trusting in himself and boasting in his own abilities do you ever think as hearers the discipline

God uses to make his servants poor insufficient instruments totally dependent upon his sovereign grace in the face of all their sensitivity of unworthiness and unfitness for the calling that they feel they're called to exercise my friends it's a mortifying experience to be a minister not unto us our Lord not unto us if ever God abuses us it's God that's at the foundation of the whole matter nothing nothing we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us now don't think of ministers in the context of their natural presentation there's a potential in the most unworthy the most humble perhaps in your judgment the most unlikely so that you may not feel very inclined to go because well we find him hard to follow or he doesn't speak very well what he's trying to say ah but my friends

[ 21 : 47 ] God condescends to men of low estate he condescends to use the instruments that will proceed most to his honor and to his glory that some are educated but not made proud the apostle Paul had feet of gladiolus Pharisee of the Pharisees greatly appreciated among the righteous of his day the religious religionists of his day but no no that wasn't the secret of his success the secret of his success was the use the Lord made of him by the anointing the leading and teaching of his Holy Spirit the benefit to us in the epistles of Paul are the fruits and effects of God using the instrument

Paul in himself was rooted and grounded in his nothingness his insufficiency to do any of the work independently of God but depending wholly upon the grace of God by the grace of God I am what I am now it's the perspective that sits in my mind to present to you that oh my friends your prayers your prayers have a great influence in the success of the preaching you say oh but Mr.

so and so and Mr. so and so look if the Lord can help you to get away the Lord can send his word by whom he will the Lord can send it and I'm not saying that you should open your pulpit door to all and sundry and say well the Lord could use him my friends you want the conviction in your heart that the minister is ordained by God even before he was born to be a servant in his day and generation the work he was to perform was settled in heaven before creation was brought forth he was foreordained in God's sovereign purposes among his church and among his people to do and to say what God was powerfully to apply to the end which God saw was useful profitable to his cause in the earth and to the spiritual benefit of his people say not

I am a child oh my friends this I was going to say is a very ready conclusion who is sufficient for these things there is nobody sufficient in and of themselves for these things all these great witnesses as ministry is recorded in the scripture all those great witnesses of whom we have had records preserved to us we take volumes of their ministry I was speaking to our friend from Holland concerning JC Philpott and the writings in Dutch he was very gracious and useful but Philpott didn't think anything of himself he was educated an MA but he didn't rely on the fact that he was an

Oxford graduate if you could get to the ear of Philpott in his day he would readily have said it's not the secret of my success it's not the secret of my ministry it's instrumentally that God has sanctified and used it as an advantage for me to present the truth but I'm nothing in myself I'm nothing in myself and Oxford is only beneficial in so far as God sovereignly as he formed in the womb so he goes on to form his ministers ministry under the sanctification of various chapters in life in their lives experiences that they must be first partakers of the fruit that they must be as it were led into the experiences of God's people that they may be able to advance before them the use

[ 27 : 22 ] God makes of instruments in the common pattern experience under the sun our trials our troubles our temptations our sorrows all the catalogue as it were of influences God of the things which we tasted handled and felt of the word of life sometimes we ministers have to go into some very strange experiences that we may be able to say something that relates to a hearer that's going through a similar chapter of experience that the two pulpit and pew may find fellowship in the Lord his word and his ways and sometimes like the eunuch as in the history of Philip in the wilderness and it doesn't seem as though that to that time the eunuch had any knowledge of the existence of Philip he was like a wilderness wanderer when the eunuch caught sight of him invited him to come up into his chariot and there there a relationship was formed between the minister and the hearer that had this effect in Philip it strengthened him as an instrument of God in the work of the ministry in the case of the eunuch he couldn't find any comfort for his soul in formal religion in Jerusalem the Jewish faith never took hold of him left him distressed to the very core of his being he was going back dejected in a wilderness within as well as a wilderness without when

Philip is brought by God to speak a word in season from the very portion of scripture that the man was reading under the influence of God at that particular point of time when he was reading of Jesus Christ his humiliation his sorrow and his sufferings for his people's salvation what was the effect why the wine of the kingdom entered into the heart of the eunuch and he went on his way rejoicing rejoicing do you see the connection and my friend it's not a connection that goes back 2000 years it's a connection that God has ordained through the instrumentality of the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe people of the world that are strangest to the workings of

God through the instrumentality of the preached word they say well you don't go into that old chapel and listen to that fellow week after week week after week telling you the same old stories that you know before he starts ah my friends if they knew the difference between hearing with the natural ear and hearing with that ear and heart prepared by a sovereign God to receive the message of the truth of the gospel that there is such a one in heaven who finished a work on earth that is the perfect way of salvation oh how differently they would judge the foolishness of our exercise in coming together to listen what God may speak through the most humble instruments that have received what I was going to say the greatest use by God for his own glory in the history of the universe do you know what it is to be lifted up in spirit like the unit was down in the doldrums beyond a sufficiency do you express the awful condition you're in and maybe as near despair as this to feel that in the face of everything basically you're a lost soul as near despair as it is brought to as you're brought as it were to the edge of the precipice of despondency and then and there as was the eunuch the gospel the gospel of Jesus

Christ that glad those glad tidings from a far country a messenger with a message God himself speaking through the golden pipe that the scripture speaks of in the conveyance of the wine of the kingdom or the oil of the spirit it makes glad the heart of man it lifts beggars from the downhill it says among the princes of God's people I'm blessed I'm blessed forever blessed my rags are gone and I am dressed with garments dyed with blood I can hear almost the Ethiopian eunuch singing it without in his own tongue as he went on his way back to Addis Ababa or to Ethiopia it's a wonderful thing wonderful thing

God it's God from the start it's God in the finish it's all God's worth it's all God's worth my stress this evening is to impress your mind especially the young people oh you may like this man and you enjoy him coming this sort of thing but beware beware of natural reactions to a spiritual exercise my friend it's far better if you crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts and you come with a hungry and thirsty soul send thy word by whom thou wilt asking the Lord to fulfill his good word and promise for what does he say

[ 36 : 01 ] Matthew 5 sermon on the mount blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled I remember our old grandfather godly minister in the Sussex churches a century ago he said a hungry soul doesn't mind eating off a cracked plate that puts in context what I've tried to say to me a hungry soul doesn't mind eating a good meal off a cracked plate let that principle affect your approach in prayer before God and in the hearing of the servants whom

God sanctifies and sends to set the gospel of his grace and truth before you as privileged hearers in the day when the multitude round about you treat this blood bought privilege of hearing the preached gospel as if it was a waste of time and nothing worth oh I feel so sick at the relative numerical conditions that obtain in our national life you think of the thousands that will go and watch the football match and while our churches and chapels are getting less and less supported in the congregations that are assembling together my friends we're crying out for judgment we're calling higher heaven for God to take his spirit and to remove as it were his ministry from among us and there is a great need appearing in the churches that's worrying some of us older ministers because yes there are some being sent and bless

God I rejoice in spirit when anybody says to me we had mr. so and so last Sunday I know he's only young he's only recently sent out oh we did have a good day my friends it's it's rejoices one in felt answered prayer that the Lord is not going to leave our children and our children's children without ministers children prepared of God in the womb brought out into life some of them the children of believers others the children of unbelievers nothing nothing creates a situation that is impossible with God I bring my sons from far my daughters from the ends of the earth oh there's a potential if only

God would pour out his spirit again upon our beloved country and cause the community to awaken to the condition that is so troublous as we anticipate the trend unless God arises the trend is going to increase the situation is going to deteriorate until such time as God comes in judgment or the Lord returns at the end of the age but now I must draw to a close wouldn't I you may look at the pulpit and you've got every right to do so if I thought of man's I'm going to use another familiar expression if a man's ministry is a dry breast

I wouldn't want indefinitely to sit under him I want to feel in my heart that that man is authorised by God under the influence of the spirit of God as his sanctifier his teacher his leader and even telling him how to say what he says yes the Lord said to Jeremiah here he'd made his mouth go to all that I send you whatsoever I command you that thou should speak so the ministers of God under God bring edification and profit to our souls in the greatest need that ever obtains in our being on the earth to be prepared for the hereafter that the truth may so distilled into our souls that we become spiritually minded that we become hungry and thirsty after righteousness that we want

[ 42:10 ] God to come and put his seal of his own work in our hearts and experiences that we know we're the subjects of the working of God the spirit to the salvation of our souls for Jesus sake for Christ Jesus says I'm going to the father and as I go to the father as the perfect saviour and satisfier of all the demands of holiness the holy spirit will not come but if I go to heaven I'll send forth the spirit the comforter who shall take of mine and he will show it unto you one of the methods by which he shows it is the declaration of the gospel by those who hold high as it were the precious name of our Lord

Jesus Christ Christ as Moses raised the brazen serpent upon the pole in the wilderness so we ministers are ordained of God to hold forth the name of Jesus Christ with the potential that under the work of the Holy Spirit your soul will be awakened your understanding will be formulated by God's showing you you need such a saviour the greatest gift that the world has ever known greater than all your providences greater than all the provisions of God giving you life maintaining your life and the mountain of his providence that he's given you to eat all the wonder of breath and I often feel this as I breathe what a miracle that we keep all of us drawing oxygen from the atmosphere generations by generations over the whole face of the earth this is going on not only humanly speaking but the atmosphere is pregnant with

God's mercy to keep us alive keep things alive and it's so far inexhaustible isn't it but the greatest need the greatest need is not our natural breath it's our spiritual preparation for going to God when God calls us from time to eternity let me quote a hymn and I'll sit down in that dread moment the moment which is the last enemy in that dread moment oh to hide beneath this sheltering blood through Jordan's icy waves divide and land my soul to arnish having mouth coming about your