

# The Voice of Jeremiah (Continued) li

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and knowing God, rather than glorying in human achievements such as wisdom, power, and riches.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 9:23

**Topics:** "Spiritual Understanding", "The Dangers of Worldly Pursuits"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of understanding and knowing God over worldly pursuits such as wisdom, power, and riches, as highlighted in Jeremiah 9:23-24. He discusses how the prophets, including Jeremiah, conveyed God's thoughts and warnings to Israel, representing a divine plan for humanity. Sparks warns against the cults of intellectualism, power, and riches, which distract from true spiritual life and lead to moral decline. He asserts that true glory lies in a relationship with God, which surpasses all earthly achievements and possessions. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a return to valuing spiritual understanding above all else.

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## Transcript

"They knew not... the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

### Two Realms of Glorifying

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, that I am the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Of all the contrasts which gave occasion to the ministry of Jeremiah it is difficult to say which was the most significant. But the more we consider the one with which we now have to deal, the more we are impressed with both its range and its ultimate import. The Prophets certainly spoke with fuller meaning than they knew, but the Spirit of God who spoke through them knew it all, backward and forward. If they spoke to their own time and conditions, our foundation statement in Acts 13, at least, declares that they spoke to all following generations. But spiritual discernment and insight will see even more than that in their utterances. This is so very true of the passage now under consideration. Very much has been written on the place and significance of Israel in history, and no doubt much more will unfold with the unfolding of world history. There are two aspects of this which we must point to in order to understand the Prophets. Those two sides are two aspects of one thing, the right and the wrong. The one thing is

## Israel's Representation in History

Has it been sufficiently recognized that God chose the Hebrew nation to be a representation in history of His eternal and heavenly thought for mankind and the world? This lay behind that nation's election or selection. That explains His mighty sovereign acts and ways in securing that nation. That explains His infinite pains and patience in bearing with that people. That explains His grace and love toward a nation which tested Him to an extreme degree. In the constituting and formation of that nation's life God introduced all the spiritual features of His Son in a symbolic way. From their father, Abraham, with his history and experience, into the redemption, separation, provisioning, discipline, ritual, laws, priests, sacrifices, tabernacle (in all its parts), conquests, inheritance, and much more, God had His Son ever and always in mind.

This all means that everything of principle and basis intended for mankind in God's full and final economy was represented and inherent in an Israel according to the mind of God. If Israel failed God and their own vocation, the failure would be nothing less than a repetition of Adam's failure, and a repetition of both the reasons for that "Fall" and the consequences.

So we come to the Prophets, whose business it was to re-express God's thoughts for Israel and the world; to show how those thoughts were violated; what the nature of the apostasy was; and what the terrible consequences would be. They were activated by God's jealous love for His eternal concept, and, seeing that the concept was not a mere abstract idea, but a human embodiment and expression, the love and jealousy were for a people chosen to represent it.

By this so-much-wider view we are able to see the implications and significance of our present Scripture, Jeremiah 9:23-24. Here the Lord puts His disapproval and veto upon a primal principle working in a threefold direction. Let it be understood that when God says "Not" in connection with "wisdom", "might" and "riches", He is not condemning those things. Elsewhere He has put His blessing upon all the three things and has never said that, in themselves, they are wrong. One of Satan's clever devices has ever been to make good things bad, and bad things good. In this threefold "Not" God is speaking of the 'glorying' in these things; that is, giving to them the glory of life. It is the old original subtlety of the serpent at work again to rob God of the glory; the one age-long jealousy and envy of Lucifer. It is the assertion of man's selfhood, his ego, to know, to dominate, to possess without reference or deference to God; the independence of egoism. Hold on to that last word, as it is the key to everything against God.

We come, therefore, to the threefold outworking of the principle.

### 1. The Cult of Intellectualism

An 'ism' is a cult. It means that the thing to which it refers has exceeded itself, gone beyond itself, its value and purpose, and become an object in itself, an ultimate and end; a purpose, a passion, a domination, an absorbing interest. As soon as you add 'ism' to a thing you resolve the thing into something which is an end in itself. It will sooner or later take the form of a religion, that is, an object of worship, the thing to which the 'worship' is given, and so the glory.

How true this is of intellectualism! No sooner does a young man set out on the course of intellectualism and make intellectual knowledge his main business than the battle of faith in God begins. He becomes intellectually superior to faith in God.

It is at this point that we must indicate the ultimate and consummate development of that primal bid for knowledge with God ignored or repudiated. It is a law in this universe that a simple seed sown has in it the potentiality of filling the world if it is not frustrated or destroyed. The seed of an independent, egoistical bid for knowledge sown in a 'garden' is now at the point of development where a terrible reaping is imminent. Why is it that knowledge - not essentially evil in itself - has reached a dimension which threatens any day to devastate this creation and all mankind? Why is it that man's ranging into outer space and mastery of nuclear forces finds him totally unable to cope with the landslide and complete breakaway of moral laws and ideals? Why is it that in an age more advanced scientifically than any before, a new barbarism and inhumanity, cruelty, lust and destruction marks the life of the world?

Today the leaders of scientific research and discovery are having to warn the world of the unspeakable holocaust which can follow those researches. Why is it? Is it not patent to any observer that there is more ungodliness in the world than has been before?

God is given small public place in the politics, industry, society of countries formerly known as 'Christian'; and secularism, atheism and God-denying ideologies creep over more and more of the world. The point is that this all goes on while the cult of intellectualism and rationalism goes alongside of moral and religious decline.

If Israel's sorry plight for so many centuries makes Israel the world's representation of the reverse of God's intention, is not the world in the way of that pathetic misdirection?

The Bible begins with chaos; proceeds to cosmos; reverts to chaos; and ends with cosmos - "a new heaven and a new earth"; but the end will only be reached when God has His rightful place in the minds of men. There was an intellect nearly two thousand years ago which has kept intellectuals on full stretch through all the centuries since, and is still doing so. It might be a good thing to give more serious consideration to what that one said about the wisdom of this world; what its limits are; what it is capable of doing; and what God's verdict upon it is. It can be found in the First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1:18-2.

## 2. The Cult of Power

"Let not the mighty man glory in his might."

Having traced the cult of intellectualism, the inordinate bid for knowledge, back to the beginning of man's declension, it is not difficult to see that the bid for power in independence upon God is all of a piece with that. Adam is on record as having projected his will as well as his reason toward self-exaltation. He was, as the Bible says, 'made to have dominion', but with a Head. He forsook his Head, violated Divine headship in order to be his own master, and lost the dominion intended by God. But he forced himself forward in independent self-sovereignty, and the world is what it is today as the result.

He never lost the sense that he was made for dominion, but alongside of it runs an innate sense that something has been lost, and he is driven by a sense of inferiority to try to recover that. That sense of loss lies behind all his strivings, wars, and straining after superiority. Sometimes defensive, sometimes offensive, sometimes the despair and suicide of frustration, often in make-believe, pretence, show, ostentation, noise. This will to power has destroyed peace and security which, like a phantom, lures him on to ever deeper frustration and defeat. It has invaded politics, industry, social life, national and international ambitions. It has not stopped short at religion, and shows its hand in the rivalries, jealousies,

factions, and strivings in organized Christianity. The fabric of life is shot through and through with the expansion of the original, initial, primal assertion of the will to power, the ego or selfhood. This dislocated lust for power is working itself out to universal destruction, and 'wars to end wars' is a fallacy, a delusion, a mockery. The one thing that man feels the need of mostly is a super-man, for he despairs of the world under its puppets. Surely history is evidencing the fatal mistake made at some time, and irrefutably testifying to man's need of a Head. The bid for power as vested in man was, and is, a revolt against God and Divine authority; the result is anarchy.

The hopeful elements in all this are that a climax is so much nearer, and that God's appointed Head over all, Heir of all, will the sooner come because the cup of this iniquity is near to being full.

### 3. The Cult of Riches

"Let not the rich man glory in his riches."

Is it necessary to spend time in arguing or pointing to the fact that possessiveness in the matter of goods, money, and 'have all' has become something worshipped by man beyond all limits? We will not extend this discussion to its full range, but bring this "Voice of the Prophets" to the place where it was specifically addressed. The primal error included this feature. It can be summed up in three words:

"I saw." "I coveted." "I took."

But it was to the Lord's people that the Prophets spoke in the first instance.

The writer of these messages, over a long period of years, has travelled in many parts of the world with one object: that is, the increase and strengthening of the spiritual life of the people of God. He has been repeatedly impressed with the fact that where the greater concern for, and engrossment with, business life to make money dominates, there it is so much more difficult to speak about the things of the Spirit. This impression has been confirmed by the equally evident fact that where life is simpler or even difficult, there the outreach of heart to the fuller knowledge of the Lord is stronger and purer.

This other 'ism' has strongly invaded Christianity, namely, 'commercialism', and is sapping and draining the spiritual life. Indeed, it is a definite menace to spirituality. We are not speaking critically about the heavy weight of responsibility in business realms, or the great problems and demands on Christian men in business. We keep close to Jeremiah's warning as to commercialism becoming a snare to pride, ambition, and 'glorying' in riches. It was the Lord who made Jeremiah warn so strongly against the commercial snare. So much could be said regarding the subtlety of the serpent as he moves with his fascination and hypnotism toward his prey - the spiritual life of the people of God. As "the serpent beguiled" to possess without consideration for, or reference to, fellowship with God, so it has ever been, and the world - and the Church - is too busy today to give adequate attention to spiritual principles and essentials. Many a great work initiated and used by God because of its spiritual character and purity has later lost its place in that realm by becoming big, with its organization, business, and commercial involvements and methods. "How is the fine gold become dim!" If that were a question instead of an exclamation the answer would largely be "commercialism".

With so much on these three warnings having to be left unsaid, we have to pass to God's "But".

"But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, that I am the Lord."

On the knowing and understanding of the Lord volumes could be written, but we can do no more here than note the ultimate implication of this alternative.

If knowledge, power, and riches bulk so large and mean so much in this world - and they do, immensely so - the Lord says here that it is going by history and destiny to be incontrovertibly proved that to know and understand the Lord in His estimate of values (see text) outweighs by far these transient glories.

The Apostle Paul said "Knowledge shall cease"; and he could and would have said the same of earthly might and riches, but the knowledge of the Lord outlives and outmeasures all.

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