

Introduction

I am indeed grateful for the privilege of being with you during these days; I have looked forward to getting to know you, to renewing old acquaintances and to sharing with you some of the good things I find in Jeremiah.

I am grateful for cordial welcome and introduction. I am sure that you have been around Colleges and Seminaries long enough to understand that presidents never introduce a man as a "farmer from Billy Goat Hill"; he is always "The Distinguished Agronomist from Angora Heights". Now that I have spent most of the past 40 years in Church Schools, Bible Colleges and Seminaries, I am a firm believer in demythologizing -- the demythologizing of introductions, that is, not the Bultmannian demythologizing.

I am a mountain preacher and school teacher from the hills of East Tennessee, down where people have 'possums for house cats and use rattlesnakes for fishing worms and corn-liquor for money.

I am a Christian by God's grace and member of RPCES by choice -- After being a member of one of the older denominations for over 50 years, I found it necessary to withdraw as a matter of principle. The problem (at least the immediate problem) was a candidate for ordination who would not affirm that he believed that God was distinct from His creation or that he was not a Pantheist and that he believed in the actual existence of God as distinguished from God as a mental projection. When asked what he would tell a person who wanted to know how to be saved, he said, "I don't know ... nobody is asking that question anymore." When asked whether Jesus actually fed the 5000, he asked very sincerely, "What difference does it make?" The examining ministers professed to see no problem and unanimously recommended his ordination -- As chairman of the examining committee, I withdrew from the Denomination (not Church) rather than make the report ... and for over a year I was not a member of any Denomination.

I thought that once a life-time was enough to go through that kind of experience and at once set out to find a group of believers with whom I could confess my faith and with whom I could work in harmony.

In the back of my grade book, I wrote these lines and phrases:

- not going to a perfect Church ... couldn't get in
- one giving generously to preaching of the gospel in some language other than English ... this will tell me where there hearts are
- one in which people sing ... this will tell me what they know about grace
- one holding sound doctrine (and for me sound doctrine means Reformed faith)
- one not conformed to the world

..... I got lists of all the Denominational groups in America and began the process of elimination ... National Council and World Council ... groups which give few pennies a week to missions ... groups whose institutions deny the faith they profess

..... During this time when I was not a member of any Denomination, I found myself for the first time very keenly aware of the difference between the words "Denomination" and "Church"

..... September 26, '69 received into Southern Presbytery; these have been happy and exciting years; I have never kept a diary, but the morning I wrote the letter withdrawing from the former Denomination, I wrote in the grade-book from II Chronicles 25:9 the words: "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this"... I've found it so...

-- Now it is my understanding that this is to be a class -- not a series of formal lectures ... you may certainly ask questions (and we will get some member of the faculty to answer them)

-- I assure you that I understand full well that taking a Hill Billy Bible College instructor and setting him in front of seminary students is like throwing a Chihuahua into a kennel of St. Bernards

-- I am not a Hebrew scholar or OT scholar ... the young people I teach think Abraham, David, Polycarp and Martin Luther were included in the 12 Apostles ... I hope, though, that you will catch something of the richness of Jeremiah's personality, that you will store his word from God in your hearts, that like Jeremiah himself, you will find God's word, eat it, and find it to be the joy and rejoicing of your heart.

-- In Calvin's dedication of his Commentaries on Jeremiah, he says that Jeremiah's prophecies have been "usefully accommodated to present circumstances." This I hope we can do in some smaller way, for I am persuaded that Jeremiah has much to say to us -- from God -- in the 1970's.