

## BONES AFIRE!

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About 600 years before the Word became flesh, God called Jeremiah to the unenviable task of prophesying to a wayward Judah. The message was often doom and gloom, not because God wanted it that way, but because the people refused to be righteous. Forty years preaching an unpopular message can wear on a man, and Jeremiah was not immune from discouragement. In fact, he was tempted to throw in the towel and quit speaking on the Lord's behalf. But he could not bring himself to do it. **"If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot"** (Jer. 20:9, ESV).

God's message was of such import and urgency that the prophet simply could not hold his peace when it needed telling. Fire makes a man move. If you hold your palm an inch above a candle flame, it will quickly cause the hand to go elsewhere. If you step barefoot on a red coal, you will hop off in short order. A hot potato in your lap will not stay there long. We know that. The point is, Jeremiah likened God's word to a fire that could not be kept in—it *had* to get out. And since *he* was the one with the message, *he* was the one who *had* to tell it. There was no option when the bones were on fire.

What of us? How closely do we identify with Jeremiah's statement? Do we feel a kinship with it, or is it a foreign concept? Can we imagine how the prophet felt, or is his attitude beyond us? God entrusted his message to a mere man named Jeremiah. Just so, God has entrusted his gospel to "jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7)—that is, *you* and *me*. If Jeremiah could do it under such discouraging circumstances, telling Judah she was about to go into captivity, then we surely can do it living in abundant freedom as part of the wealthiest society in the history of earth, telling the good news that leads to ultimate freedom and release from spiritual bondage. For his efforts, Jeremiah was thanked by being thrown in a dungeon, where he sank in the mire (Jer. 38:6). We, on the other hand, can teach the gospel publicly or privately and the authorities will not lift a finger to stop us. Will it happen? The answer lies in discovering whether there is fire in our bones.

Can you see good works being done for the Lord and yet fail to encourage them? If so, you do not have fire in your bones. Or, can you see a brother in sin and yet fail, in love, to rebuke him? If so, you do not have fire in your bones. The Holy Spirit does not cause us to speak by inspiration, as did Jeremiah. But the Bible says the same Spirit who inspired Jeremiah is in the Christian (1 Cor. 6:19), and we are to cooperate so that powerful works can be accomplished to God's glory by the Holy Spirit in us (Eph. 3:20). Moreover, Paul specifically warned that we "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). If each of us implements these principles to the fullest, it will help transform ourselves, our families, our congregation, and—to some extent—our world. Are your bones afire?

