The Call Of Jeremiah
Jeremiah 1:4-19

Introduction

Access almost any news source and you will read that our country is on the verge of an economic depression, a possible collapse of our currency, massive debt, record unemployment; our resources are dwindling, our military and trade obligations expanding, political upheaval, party politics deepening the divide between American and American.

All nations experience times of prosperity and adversity. When Jeremiah received his call to the ministry the country was in a deep moral decline; on the home front Judea was in a state of almost complete apostasy; the northern kingdom of Israel had already collapsed; Assyria threatened to the North; Babylon was growing in strength and power to the east; and Egypt still made claims to Judea.

Jeremiah was called to the ministry during a difficult time in his nation’s history. Immorality was on the rise, idolatry a way of life, violence, brutality, and the worship of false gods was everywhere. Jeremiah was appointed by God to warn Judea and the surrounding nations of God’s coming judgment. But Jeremiah was also sent to assure the true believer of God’s loving kindness, God’s eternal love, God’s personal care, and to repeat the promises given in the past that a Messiah, God’s Messiah was on His way.

Few people ever were called to a more difficult or demanding assignment than Jeremiah. Jeremiah was faithful. He never ceased to remind the people of God’s message of imminent judgment. The message was met with resistance and much of Jeremiah’s life was spent in isolation and rejection. But Jeremiah remained faithful and true.

Can you imagine living in a generation where people were more concerned about money and materialism that spiritual matters; can you imagine where people lived to satisfy their cravings, worshiping idols but all the while confessing a deep and sincere belief about religious traditions?

The call of Jeremiah was direct, personal, and specific.

The Call Of Jeremiah (vv.4-5)

*Jeremiah 1:4 (NKJV)* Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

*Jeremiah 1:5 (NKJV)* Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations.

Notice the language of the Lord; “knew” “sanctified” and “ordained”.
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Here is the language of predestination and foreordination. It is also significant that Jeremiah is called a prophet to the nations. We have every reason to believe that Jeremiah’s words have something to do with us and our nation.

The point seems to build confidence and assurance in Jeremiah. The Hebrew word translated “knew” is yada and describes a perfect knowledge, a complete knowledge, a time-less all encompassing knowledge. Clearly God knows all things in advance; and that knowledge about Jeremiah was full and complete. The Lord was well aware of all his faults and virtues, strength and weakness, failure and success. God knew that Jeremiah would trust the Lord; and would walk in the integrity of that calling; and God’s choice—was God’s choice.

The word sanctified means to be “set apart” for a specific purpose. Jeremiah was born into a priestly family; but God called and set Jeremiah apart to be a prophet to the nations. He was therefore not to engage in activities that would hinder or limit or prohibit that function.

The ordination or appointment; prophet to the nations may seem like a very high calling. God created the world—and the nations and can ordain and appoint whomever He pleases.

God has made only one person Lord and Savior of the Universe. That person is Jesus Christ.

God chose Abraham to be the Father of Israel. God would set aside a race of people to bring forth God’s Messiah. Jeremiah was to be a prophet to the nations (people groups). Through Jeremiah God warned the world; and continues to warn the world. Unless we repent of our sins, and trust the Lord—God’s hand of judgment looms large.

Galatians 1:15 (NKJV) But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace,

In what way is the believer “called” “chosen” “accepted”? We are called, chosen adopted and accepted in Jesus Christ (Ephesians chapter 1-2). Paul writes in the book of Ephesians chapter 1 that our salvation was planned by the Father, purchased by the Son, and preserved by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:1-14). God blessed us (vv.1-3); and selected us (v.4); before he made the world; that we might be holy and without fault in his eyes. The Father adopted us (vv.5-6). The purchase of Jesus was by his blood and one day he will gather us to himself. He did this that we might praise God (v.11-12). The Holy Spirit’s presence serves as a special seal on our heart; and His presence guarantees our eternal security (v.14).

The Concern Of Jeremiah (v.6)

Jeremiah 1:6 (NKJV) Then said I:  
Ah, Lord GOD!  
Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.
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Jeremiah’s response. I’m too young. I’m inarticulate (or inexperienced). The ministry of Jeremiah would stretch over 41 years. Some Bible scholars put Jeremiah’s age at about 20 years old. Whatever his age Jeremiah was old enough to understand the wickedness of his people and his own heart, and the inadequacies and inexperience of his life.

The chief function of a prophet was speech. Even Moses said, “Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent... I am slow of speech” (Exodus 4:10). Isaiah wrote; “Woe is me, for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa.6:5); Isaiah is in effect saying I am too dirty to transmit God’s message.

Jeremiah could easily have said, “let me take some speech classes at Jerusalem Junior College; or the City of David Metro University. Give me an opportunity to go the school of the prophets so at least I will have something to say if people question my credentials.

Jeremiah experienced an overwhelming sense of inadequacy, immaturity, inexperience. But God does not necessarily call the qualified, but rather qualifies the called.

Jeremiah was sensitive, emotional, he was encouraged by success and threatened by failure, and was clearly and keenly aware of the heavy burden that the Lord God had placed on his shoulders.

We can find lots of excuses to resist the call of God. But in spite of our weakness we must allow the Lord the opportunity to be strong in our lives.

The Consolation Of Jeremiah (vv.7-10)

Jeremiah 1:7 (NKJV) But the Lord said to me:  
Do not say, I am a youth,  
For you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
And whatever I command you, you shall speak.

The Lord God enables those He calls. The Lord does not play to Jeremiah’s ego or build his self-esteem, but rather reminds Jeremiah that the Lord God, the all sufficient, and the all powerful God would direct Jeremiah’s ministry and give Jeremiah the specific words necessary to represent the Lord. Think about that for just a moment. The Lord God dismisses Jeremiah’s objection on the grounds that the authority of the Message does not lie in the person who speaks the Message but rather on the grounds of the authority of the One who gave the Message. Clearly the Gospel’s power does not lie in the person who speaks; but rather on the Message itself.

Clearly God has a people group in mind, Jeremiah will be sent by God with a message from God.

Jeremiah 1:8 (NKJV) Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.
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“Lord the people are looking at me. Look at those cold, hard, stares. Lord these people aren’t enjoying this, they don’t welcome the message.” “Lord look at the angry stares, look at the contempt and incredulity on their faces”.

Jeremiah would have to find encouragement in the Lord, Jeremiah would need to find comfort in the unseen presence of God. The Lord’s promise; “For I am with you to deliver you” says the Lord. The Lord’s call brings the Lord’s consolation.

The call of the Lord was real, and personal. And God’s call included God’s message.

Over and over again in the Scriptures the Lord says to His servants; “fear not” or don’t be afraid. God told the same thing to Abraham (Gen. 15:1); Moses (Num. 21:34; Deut. 3:2); Daniel (Dan. 10:12,19), Mary (Luke 1:30); Peter (Luke 5:10); Paul (Acts 27:24).

*Jeremiah 1:9 (NKJV)* Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me:

*Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.*

Jeremiah does not have to make up a message. Human wisdom is not a substitute for Divine revelation. The message comes from God’s hand to the mouth of Jeremiah and straight to our hearts. God spoke to Jeremiah. Jeremiah spoke to his generation. And those words still contain power for those who are willing to listen, understand and obey.

How are we to measure the success of our ministry? If outward evidence includes response by the people Jeremiah’s ministry must be counted a failure!

*Jeremiah 1:10 (NKJV)* See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant.

When God calls a person, when Jesus saves and calls us; we are given what we need. In Jeremiah’s case he needed a sense of assurance, a sense of encouragement. Sound far-fetched? Isn’t that exactly what you need? God’s assurance. God’s encouragement. Jeremiah needed the confidence to understand and speak God’s message to the nations.

Think of what has already happened in the passage. God gives Jeremiah the promise of his presence and protection. When the time comes for Jeremiah to speak the message he will be able to deliver God’s message in spite of opposition, trial, persecution. What else has the Lord done? In verse 9 the Lord touches Jeremiah’s mouth. This represents or symbolizes God’s Word; and the power and authority of that Word; and because the Word has power and authority, the young man has power and authority. From this point forward Jeremiah has no need to feel inadequate, insecure, insufficient. The Lord has given Jeremiah what is necessary; His own message, His own word. And now in verse 10 God spells out that message that is to be given to the nations.
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The message is a message of God’s judgment, God’s mercy, and God’s salvation. The Lord will uproot and rebuild the nations and people who repent. If the people turn away from their sins and turn to the Lord, God will pardon them and save them. However, if the people remain blind and deaf and unwilling to turn from their wickedness, if they continue in rebellion, if they continue to disobey God’s righteous commandments, the day of judgment was coming to all who rebel and resist the Lord. This was God’s Word that Jeremiah was called to proclaim. A Word that included pardon and mercy, grace and forgiveness, but also a Word of condemnation for those who continued in unrighteousness and rebellion.

We can take great comfort in the fact that the moment the Lord asks us to do or be anything; he will call us and equip us. We will be given all that we need to accomplish whatever task He assigns. God does not necessarily call the qualified, but qualifies the called; God’s call is not limited to ability, but availability. God’s call is not based on appearance, race, charisma, voice quality, or personality, or oratorical sophistication. God’s call is not even based on intellectual capacity, theological ability, or the ability to come up with dramatic, emotional connections; God’s call seems to be based on a person’s heart; how open is that heart; how committed to things of God; God is looking for an open and loving and surrendered heart.

In the New Testament Paul reminds the Corinthians that there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different administrations, but the same Lord. And there are different operations, but the same God works all in all. But the gifts of the Spirit and the manifestation of those gifts are given for the benefit of all (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-12).

The Confirmation Of Jeremiah (vv.11-19)

Jeremiah 1:11 (NKJV) Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see a branch of an almond tree.

The Lord would sometimes speak to the prophets by means of visions. A vision is not an imaginary event or wishful thinking or something the prophet makes up in their own imagination. It is the Word of the Lord.

Jeremiah’s vision is the branch of an almond tree. In the Middle East the almond tree is the first to bud and come to life after the winter. In the ancient culture of Israel the Almond Tree was called “the wake” tree (Hebrew shoqued). Jeremiah may have been wondering when the Lord God would intervene in the affairs of Judah; and has a vision of a “wake” tree--the idea--God is awake and ready to act; God was ready; the proper time had come.

The vision in part was to confirm to Jeremiah God’s willingness to act; and that God would act quickly to perform His will. Jeremiah sees the almond tree blossom. This is a sure sign that Spring has come. God assures Jeremiah that he sees what God wants him to see.
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Jeremiah 1:12 (NKJV) Then the Lord said to me, You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.

Why is this important? When certain events take place--God wants Jeremiah to know that God will fulfill His promises and warnings. If the people continued in wickedness--punishment--judgment. But if the people repent of their sins and turn to the Lord--forgiveness and salvation.

Just like Jeremiah saw the almond tree bud--and flower--a sure sign of spring--so God watched the times and the seasons of the earth to determine the right moment to execute judgment.

Jeremiah 1:13-14 (NKJV) 13And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, What do you see? And I said, I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north. 14Then the Lord said to me: Out of the north calamity shall break forth On all the inhabitants of the land.

The pot or the cauldon was a cooking pot; where meats and vegetables could be boiled. Jeremiah sees a boiling cauldron, a seething pot spilling over; towards the north. Things are about to boil over to the North. When a pot spills over those who are in the way of the hot liquid run the risk of being burned.

God is in control of the events in world history. He makes kingdoms to rise and kingdoms to fall. God can and will use nations to serve as instruments of punishment or blessing.

The judgment of Israel does not come on the basis of whim, or fate, or the unpredictability of nations and their rulers. The Bible makes it clear--that the impending judgment of Judea is based on the inevitable harvest of sin (1:16)(see p. 16 The Book of Jeremiah; K. Owen White).

Jeremiah 1:15 (NKJV) For behold, I am calling All the families of the kingdoms of the north, says the Lord; They shall come and each one set his throne At the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, Against all its walls all around, And against all the cities of Judah.

Jeremiah 1:16 (NKJV) 16 I will utter My judgments Against them concerning all their wickedness, Because they have forsaken Me, Burned incense to other gods, And worshiped the works of their own hands.

K. Owen White (p.16)

God says that these invading, conquering armies will represent his disciplinary handfalling upon people who had deliberately (1) forsaken him, (2) burned incense to other gods, (3) worshipped man-made idols. The time is ripe for judgment. Moral and spiritual regression are about to bear their destructive harvest.

K. Owen White (p.16)
Remember the Lord is speaking to Judah. They broke their covenant. They failed to honor the promise of God. In consequence the curses outlined in Deuteronomy 28:15-68--were to fall upon them.

Why does the Bible call us to consider over and over again the consequences of willful sin and rebellion? If we live wicked lives we invite judgment.

Jeremiah 1:17 (NKJV)       Therefore prepare yourself and arise,  
And speak to them all that I command you.  
Do not be dismayed before their faces,  
Lest I dismay you before them.

Jeremiah is commanded to speak “all that I command you”. There is no room for Jeremiah’s thoughts, ideas, opinions or suggestions. Jeremiah has no obligation to teach the failed philosophies of even the wisest human beings; he is not invited to obtain an advanced degree in psychology, or even theology, he is not called to master the great ideas or read the vast accumulated knowledge of the wisdom and science of sinful human beings.

Does that mean education or preparation plays no role in the life of a believer? I don’t think so.

Jeremiah’s job was unique. Jeremiah’s job was to preach God’s Word and God’s message. And only that message. God also gives a rather harsh warning to Jeremiah. Don’t turn back. Don’t flinch. Don’t shrink. Do not fear the opposition of the people. Do not abandon the mission. Do not flee the mission. God will punish you if you flee the mission. He himself would face the terrifying consequences of the judgment of the Lord.

What does that mean for you and me? We are constantly warned not to forsake our calling, we are to avoid backsliding and turning away from our God-given commitments. Whatever your mission, whatever your calling, fulfill your calling.

Jeremiah 1:18 (NKJV)      For behold, I have made you this day  
A fortified city and an iron pillar,  
And bronze walls against the whole land  
Against the kings of Judah,  
Against its princes,  
Against its priests,  
And against the people of the land.

The Lord uses a series of metaphors or figures of speech that represent defensive speech.

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A fortified city and an iron pillar,
The Lord will give Jeremiah the ability to face every angry stare, the mocking, the opposition, the persecution; Jeremiah would be invincible, impegnable (v.18); strong as a fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall. No matter who attacked or brought opposition--king, government official, priest, religious worker, mobs of people, he would be empowered to stand against them all. They would not be able to break down his strength or overcome him.

The point the Lord makes is the people will reject the message; the prophet’s enemy shall be his own people. Everyone will reject the message, leaders, kings, princes, rulers, priests and people will all unite against the message that Jeremiah brings. The people’s resistance will not be passive but open and dramatic. And the Lord repeats the promise;

Jeremiah 1:19 (NKJV) They will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, says the Lord, deliver you.

What’s at stake?

The people reject God’s judgment and punishment. The Lord reminds Jeremiah that the people will fight against him and his message; but they will not prevail; because the Lord is with Jeremiah.

Conclusion

Jeremiah will remain faithful to his call. He will declare the glory, the majesty, and the righteousness of God to his generation. He will also declare the need to live lives that are honoring and pleasing to the Lord. And there’s the rub. What does it mean to live a righteous and godly life in our generation?

Does God care if we live wicked lives? Does godly living matter anymore?

Peter wrote; “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations (trials), and to reserve the unjust for Judgment Day to be punished (2 Peter 2:9).