

“Jeremiah: The Call”

Jeremiah 1:1-10

Baxter Exum (#966)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
April 20, 2008

Four Lakes Church of Christ



CLICK HERE

Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to begin a series of lessons based on the life of an Old Testament prophet by the name of Jeremiah. You may want to be turning with me to **Jeremiah 1**. I have actually been looking forward to this for more than a year now, and so I would like for us to take the next several weeks to study some of the highlights from one of the most courageous prophets in the Old Testament.

We know that Jeremiah started his ministry in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, during the reign of King Josiah. You might remember that Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king, and King Josiah started a series of reforms in an attempt to bring the nation of Israel back to God. Things were very bad—so bad, in fact, that as the priests were cleaning out the temple, as they were basically taking out the trash, they discover the word of God. The nation had drifted so far away from God, they were so deep into the worship of idols and pagan gods, that the people had actually lost God’s law in the temple—they had misplaced the Law of Moses! And yet in an interesting twist, the priest who finds the word of God is a man by the name of Hilkiah. Why is this significant? If you will, please look with me at the opening verses of the book of Jeremiah. **Jeremiah 1:1-3**...

¹ The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

And so we find in **verse 1** that Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah. We are not told whether this is the same Hilkiah who found the scroll, but the timeframe certainly fits, and it would be a rather interesting connection, to say the least. Jeremiah, therefore, was the son of a priest, and he was called as a prophet during the rule of King Josiah—right at the time when Josiah was trying to bring the people closer to God. And yet as we look at those other kings who are mentioned, we understand that Jeremiah was basically fighting a lost cause—the people were determined to do evil, and so as we find in **verse 3**, Jeremiah continued to prophesy all the way until Jerusalem was captured and the residents were taken into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.

At the time that Jeremiah was called by God, the Northern Kingdom had already been taken into Assyrian captivity a hundred years before, and Jeremiah could see that the Southern Kingdom was headed in the same direction. Throughout the course of his ministry, the situation got worse and worse, and Jeremiah faced some intense persecution. The situation was very bad, but God could not allow it to go on forever. After all, God's Son was to be born to a woman from the nation of Israel—and God could not allow His people to drift completely into apostasy. God needed a prophet. God needed a man of tremendous courage to step up and to take on kings, and false prophets, and enemy nations. God needed a messenger. And with that, we come to **Jeremiah 1:4-10**, **»PPT»** the call of Jeremiah the prophet. God's first word to Jeremiah comes in approximately 627 BC. Students of the Old Testament tell us that Jeremiah was most likely 14-15 years old at this point (we have two people here at this congregation who are in this age range, so maybe we can try to imagine them getting this call from God). If you will, please look with me at **Jeremiah 1:4-10**...

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶ Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth." ⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. ⁹ Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. ¹⁰ "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

As we look back at God's call of the great prophet Jeremiah, I would like for us to consider several ideas that will hopefully be able to give us the same kind of courage that he had, as we bring the word of God to a culture that has also drifted far away from God's word.

I. One of the first things we notice, and one of the things that should give us courage, is the fact that GOD KNEW JEREMIAH EVEN BEFORE HE WAS BORN. **»PPT»**

This is a passage that our modern generation needs to read very carefully. On September 11, 2001, nearly 3,000 people were killed. Some people refer to it as a tragedy. It was not a tragedy. It was an atrocity. It was horrible. Evil men invaded our nation—terrorism of the worst sort. Those 3,000 who were killed had so much potential. They could have done great things. They could have become great leaders. They could have discovered cures for some of the world's dreaded diseases. They could have become great poets and artists. So much potential was lost when those 3,000 died. But the truth is, 3,000 people were also killed on September 12, 3,000 were killed on September 13, 3,000 were killed on September 14. On average,

more than 3,000 innocent lives continue to be snuffed out every single day, right here in the United States of America. Every year in our nation alone, roughly 1.2 million children are aborted.

There has been a huge outcry over those lives that were taken on September 11, 2001, and rightfully so. But where is the national outrage over those 3,000 lives that continue to be taken every single day? The blood of those innocent children speaks to God, to tell Him of the unspeakable horror that is being perpetrated on the children of this nation. And there will be vengeance for their deaths, but the vengeance will not be taken on Iraq, because Iraqis did not kill these innocent lives, these lives were taken by our fellow Americans!

As we are thinking about human life between conception and birth, we are looking at one of the new 3-D ultrasounds, and the baby here is shown at some point before birth. Back in the old days, we had to look at our children in those fuzzy 2-D black and white ultrasound images. But today it is so much better. And we are reminded here this morning that God knows our children before they are born. I also want to share a photo that I also shared a few years ago. **▶PPT▶** It was taken by photographer Michael Clancy during a surgery performed at Vanderbilt University in Nashville on August 19, 1999. The surgical team had developed a procedure to correct problems before birth by removing the uterus, draining the amniotic fluid, doing the surgery, and then returning the uterus inside the mother.

The surgery they were doing here was to correct spina bifida (if I remember correctly, the child shown here is roughly 21 weeks old), but according to the photographer, as they were finishing up and getting ready to put everything back together, the boy's hand popped out of the womb and squeezed the doctor's finger. The baby's name is Samuel Armas, and he was born healthy on December 2, 1999. He is now 8 years old.

As we go back to **Jeremiah 1**, therefore, we learn from **verse 5** that God knew Jeremiah before he was born! Before he was born, Jeremiah was a human being. And so it seems that as God is calling Jeremiah to be a prophet, God is giving a word of encouragement as He reminds Jeremiah that He knew him even before he was born. We need to let that sink in just a little bit, because not even our parents can say that! As parents, we know how excited we were to see our children on the ultrasound for the very first time. We were excited to see them face-to-face once they were born. We could hardly wait to see what they looked like. And yet when we were meeting them for the first time, the Bible teaches that God already knew them.

Someone might say, **"But this is Jeremiah. He was different. He was special."** And yet the same idea is repeated several times in the Bible. We remember the words of King David in **Psalm 139:13-16**, where David said...

¹³ For You formed my inward parts; you wove me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, when I

was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; ¹⁶ Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

We know from earlier in the Old Testament that a young woman by the name of Rebekah conceived twin boys, and they were struggling with one another inside of her. She went to the Lord in **Genesis 25:22** and asked why, and the Lord said, ***"Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger."*** God, therefore, not only saw Jacob and Esau as human beings, but He looked at them as ***"nations."*** God could see the children of their children's children.

We remember from the New Testament that when Elizabeth and Mary were both pregnant, they met each other for the first time, and John the Baptist did a little flip inside his mother when he heard Mary's voice. We know at that point that God was dwelling inside Mary in the form of a baby. Jesus, therefore, experienced all levels of human development—from conception to birth and through adulthood.

First of all, then, we learn that God knew Jeremiah (as He knows all little babies) even before he was born.

II. As we continue looking back at our Scripture for this morning, we also find that GOD HAD A PLAN FOR JEREMIAH'S LIFE. » PPT »

In other words, Jeremiah's life was not an accident. But instead, his life was planned by God. Jeremiah was born to his mother and to his father Hilkiah the priest for a reason. In **verse 5**, God says, ***"...and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."*** The word ***"consecrated"*** refers to being set aside for a special purpose.

In a similar way, we might also say that we do not exist today simply to make a living, raise a family, grow old, and die. That is not all that there is to life. We are not accidents. We are not merely the end result of millions of years of random mutations. We did not evolve to the point where we are today, but we were put on this earth for a purpose. As I understand it, my purpose in life is to glorify God. In fact, the purpose of every person who has ever lived is to glorify God. We may do that in different ways, but the purpose for being alive is to glorify God. But the interesting thing about being human is that all of us have a choice.

The great heroes of faith made the right choice. For example, the preacher Stephen made an interesting comment in **Acts 13:36**, when he said, ***"For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay."*** In other words, David conformed his life to God's plan. David, ***"...served the purpose of God in his own generation."***

And again, this is not something that God forces us to do—we have a choice. We can read about the Pharisees in **Luke 7:29-30**. God even had a plan for the Pharisees, but the Bible says, ***"When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John."*** In other words, God's purpose was that the Pharisees would accept the preaching of John the Baptist, that they would obey the word of God, and that they would be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. And yet we know that the Pharisees (for the most part) rejected the preaching of John the Baptist. They rejected God's plan for their lives. Thankfully, a little bit later, there was a Pharisee who obeyed—a man by the name of Paul.

God is telling us, therefore, that He has a purpose for us. We were born for a reason. We can follow God's plan, or we can turn away from it, but all of us have a choice—all of us can go in one of two very different directions. We remember what Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:9**, ***"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."*** The Lord wants all people to turn away from sinful behavior. He is not eager to punish, but He is patient to save. As Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 2:4**, we pray to God, ***"...who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*** God's purpose for all people is that we end up being saved. And yet the fulfillment of that purpose is completely up to us.

In a similar way, God also had a very specific purpose for Jeremiah—God had plans that Jeremiah would serve as a prophet to the nations.

III. As we keep moving in our passage, however, we come to a series of excuses to the point that GOD HAS TO GIVE JEREMIAH SOME ASSURANCE. »PPT»

In **verse 6**, we find Jeremiah's first response. The NASB has him starting with the word **"Alas!"** This seems rather strange to me. Have you ever heard a teenager use the word **"Alas"**? I have not, and I hope I never do! And this might be an appropriate translation. It is certainly accurate. But some of the commentaries point out that the original word was something that we might expect to hear from a teenager—**"Ahah"**—almost a cross between an exclamation and a whine. It is hard to describe. It's almost something you might hear when you tell a teenager to clean his room or take out the trash or mow the lawn, **"Ahah."** And we almost expect it to be followed by, **"Do I have to?"** Remember, Jeremiah is most likely 14-15 years old—that might explain a lot of this. And so when God tells him that he has been appointed as a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah responds, ***"Ahah, Lord God! I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."*** Jeremiah was saying, **"Ahah,"** to almighty God in heaven!

This response might sound a little familiar. In fact, it was quite common for great leaders to first respond to God's call with a little protest. We remember what happened with Moses. God told Moses to go to Pharaoh, and in **Exodus 3-4**, Moses

gives a series of five excuses. God, of course, answers every one. The last excuse was that Moses was not a good speaker—one of the same excuses given by Jeremiah in **verse 6**.

We remember the call of Isaiah the prophet. When Isaiah saw the Lord in **Isaiah 6**, Isaiah responded in **verse 5** by saying, ***"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."*** Isaiah also felt a sense of inadequacy before God.

But we notice that God does not take "No" for an answer. Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker, ***"Do you believe in love at first sight, or shall I drive by again?"*** I think we might say that God was driving by again! God was giving him another opportunity. God does not let us off the hook that easy.

And so we find that God responds Jeremiah's excuses right away, starting with Jeremiah's idea that he was too young. Perhaps Jeremiah's real problem was that he was short-sighted. He could not see very far into the future. It was difficult to take the long view. He could not see past the obstacles that were right there in his way. I know that personally I am near-sighted, and without glasses I cannot see very far. My father and my grandfather are the same way. Years ago, I remember my grandfather telling us that he got some glasses made especially for preaching. He normally wore bifocals, but for preaching he got some identical glasses made that were perfected for looking at his notes. But these were not bifocals—the whole lens was like the bottom part of bifocals. It had the added benefit of almost completely eliminating nervousness—he could not see anything beyond the pulpit, the entire congregation was nothing but a big blur! Perhaps Jeremiah had a similar problem—he could only see the present, he was not looking to the future, he had a hard time seeing God, and so he told God that he could not do it.

We remember that the young preacher Timothy apparently also struggled with being rather young. And in response to those struggles, the apostle Paul wrote the words that we find in **1 Timothy 4:12**, where he said, ***"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."***

Maybe we could put ourselves in Jeremiah's place. How would we have reacted if God had come to us at the age of 14-15 and if He told us that we would be sent to preach to the nations? We might have said, ***"Ahah, Lord God, there is no way!"*** But the excuse of being too young did not work for Jeremiah, just as it will not work for any of us today. We need to understand the importance of obeying God, especially when we are young. Not long ago, I read about a man who was running to catch a ferry, but he got there just as the gate shut, and he missed the boat. Someone standing nearby said, ***"Well I guess you didn't run fast enough."*** And the man responded, ***"No, I ran fast enough, but I did not start on time."*** That man understood a very important lesson. The time that we start has a lot to do with how well we cross the finish line. We would encourage those who are young to follow God while you are still able to do so. Start early and finish well.

Nevertheless, in response to his objections, God promised Jeremiah that He would provide the words and that the things spoken by Jeremiah would take place. And so God, therefore, gave Jeremiah the assurance he needed.

Conclusion & Invitation:

We start out the book of **Jeremiah**, then, by looking at the fact that God knew Jeremiah before he was born, God had a plan, and yet even after Jeremiah's objections, God was able to offer assurance. Jeremiah went on to become one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament.

In fact, in the New Testament, you might remember that Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying that He was. Their response is found in **Matthew 16:14**, where they said, **"Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."** More than 600 years later, people were mistaking Jesus Christ the Son of God for the prophet Jeremiah! What an honor that must have been!

Why was Jeremiah so respected? We will get into it quite a bit more over the next few weeks, but I would suggest one of the main reasons for Jeremiah's success is that he discovered God's purpose for his life and he fulfilled the plans that God had made.

I would like for us to close this morning with a question: If we have found our place in God's plan, are we using our lives to the glory of God? Are we fulfilling God's purpose? God's plan is that we end up in a saved condition, and God has already done His part through the death of His Son. We react to that sacrifice with faithful, loving obedience. We turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. Will we be like the Pharisees who rejected God's plan for their lives? Or will we be like King David, and Jeremiah, and the apostle Paul, who accepted God's plan and acted on their acceptance? If you are ready to make that choice, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org