

July 16, 2017

Lesson 7: Jeremiah's Call and Commission

Scripture: Jeremiah 4: 1-10

Context:

Today we continue looking at the line of prophets as we move to Jeremiah. The writings of Jeremiah came at a time when written prophecy was beginning to appear more in the ancient world.¹ The time of Jeremiah was in the reign of King Josiah, a time of political unrest (1: 1-3) during the sixth century. The eighth through sixth centuries was a time of division and upheaval for both kingdoms as they had divided and were lost collectively as a people. From the middle of the eighth century, the Northern Kingdom had experienced political upheaval with factions and external threats from Assyria.² The Northern Kingdom (Israel) continued to experience a decline of its national identity with the constant invasions of first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians starting in the sixth century. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) also fluctuated during this time, but not as much as the Northern Kingdom.

The time of Jeremiah's writing comes towards the latter part of this struggle. Prophetic literature before this time came with different prophets addressing the struggles during the Assyrian domination of the eighth century: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah.³ Other prophets came as the Babylonians took control at the close of the seventh and first half of the sixth centuries B.C.⁴ The prophets included Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Jeremiah came at a time when King Josiah and the kingdom of Judah were dealing with the Egyptians who had begun to move in politically and make alliances with the Assyrians. As Josiah attempted to make reforms, there was a pushback from the people and the events continued to spiral out of control. When King Josiah died, his family continued to internally fight and the people went astray.

Thus, Jeremiah was a prophet in a time where the future looked grim as the people experienced the influx of foreign armies. Prophets were sometimes those who predicted the doom and gloom and then would return with a word of hope for the people. Jeremiah's time as a prophet was scary. The kingdoms had been divided, the Assyrians were conquering the ancient world, and the people had been found to continue to worship other gods. It is no wonder that Jeremiah would be reluctant to face the people and tell them the truth about what would come and the process they would have in returning home. Today's scripture focuses on how God has called Jeremiah and that God made Jeremiah just for this time. His age does not matter and he is not to be afraid of the people. God will even put the words in his mouth that he needs to speak the truth. Jeremiah does not belong to the people or even the royalty; he is the mouthpiece for God.

¹ R.E. Clements, "Jeremiah", Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988), 2.

² Ibid, 2.

³ Ibid, 3.

⁴ Ibid, 3.

Application:

This passage from Jeremiah has one of the strongest pieces of scripture that is at the core of how much God loves us: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.”⁵ God created each one of us and even before we were born, blessed us with gifts and graces that develop as we grow. When I have studied or heard this scripture preached or taught, I always think of Prevenient grace; the fact that God’s grace was and is with us before we even knew it. It’s one of the verses I always draw back to when people ask why we have infant baptism; God is working in the child’s life and we are witnesses and participants as the child’s parents promise to raise them in the church.

We are reminded that each life is important and that God’s fingerprints are all over us. We are all children of God and we all have a purpose in this life. We may not realize it when we are young and our purpose may even change over time. But God doesn’t make a mistake in creating us. Even Jeremiah couldn’t escape the fact that he was called by God and not to be intimidated by the people or allow his age to be an excuse.

From time to time we all need to be reminded that whatever we may face, God can use us. Just this past week, I had my first Sunday at my new appointment. In moving from a two - point small membership charge to a large membership church, I certainly had my reservations and a medium-sized dose of nervousness. I have never preached to large crowds and never even interned at a church the size of where I now serve. Just preparing for Sunday and waking up that day felt like an adrenaline rush. After preaching at The Bridge, our contemporary worship service, I was ushered to the parlor for a reception in my honor. But as I shook hands and met more people than I could count, I met an older gentleman who had some words of wisdom for me: “It’s like what I told the associate before you; just preach the Gospel and God will do the rest.” It was a nice reminder for me to remember that I had heard the call and responded. God will fill in the rest. My fears and my nervousness were valid, but God would use me to speak and would direct me with my gifts and talents.

Just like Jeremiah, we are to be reminded that God has created each one of us and has plans for us in this world. Our age, our fears, and our anxieties are not to be the things that hold us back or deter us from whatever we face. Instead, we are to remember that God has called each one of us and will be with us wherever we may go.

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⁵ Jer. 1: 5, NRSV.

