

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-19 (OT page 755-756)

Reader: Andrew Thomson

Background to the reading

Jeremiah was the son of a priest, his birthplace Anathoth being a city specially set aside for priestly families. It was close to Jerusalem, and the priests would have made the short journey to the city as required in order to perform their duties.

The phrase *The word of the Lord came to him* is a typical way of speaking about a prophet's call in the OT. It shows well how the prophetic mission was not sought by the person to whom it came. Rather, God chose the person for his purpose. His will, once revealed, required that Jeremiah yield himself wholly to it.

At first Jeremiah said no. He cannot do it because he is too young and cannot speak well. When looking into the social context of those times, he had a very valid excuse. In those days Jewish men could speak with authority when they reached the age of thirty and would only then be taken seriously. We do not know what his age was but only that he was clearly not thirty!

But he would learn fast. There are two words we can never use when the Lord calls us namely: No Lord! We see this not only in the life of Jeremiah but also in the life and calling of Moses and Jonah.

But the Lord, however, had anticipated his objection; he knew and appointed him before he was born. So God touched his mouth and gave him the authority and words to speak to the nations. God affirmed and validated Jeremiah's call.

God reassured Jeremiah that he would protect him from those who would oppose and hate him. As a bearer of God's word he shared, in a sense, in God's authority even over *kingdoms*.

God gave Jeremiah visions to confirm His assurance to him that the call was authentic. The first vision, the branch of an *almond tree*, was to encourage him. The almond tree was one of the first trees to blossom. If the almond tree blossomed it was a sure sign that Spring have arrived. God is telling Jeremiah to remember that He will do what He promised.

The second vision, of a *boiling pot*, shows that the message would be one of judgment at the hands of a people from the north (14). The picture of the tilting boiling pot is derived from the practice whereby soldiers used to drive away their attackers by throwing boiling oil on them from above the high walls which surrounded the cities. God will punish Judah through the enemy from the north because they did not obey Him and worshipped idols.

Babylon was not yet specified. Jeremiah may not initially have known that Babylon would be the foe in question. The setting up of the *thrones* of foreign kings in the *gates of Jerusalem* (15) implies that they, and their gods, now ruled there.

The sin for which the people would be judged was the fundamental one of breaking the covenant with the Lord, by the rejection of him in favour of other gods (16). This was to attack the covenant at its roots, just as the people had done at the time when it was first made, at Mount Sinai. This will remain the constant theme in the book.

Finally, Jeremiah was told again to stand firm (17). As the nation would have enemies, so would he, among the people themselves, including the powerful among them (18). The Lord, however, is more powerful than they, and he will protect him (19).

Amen

MP 587

Search me, O God, and know my heart today

Sermon

7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

Next year in April I will be celebrating 20 years in full time ministry. And I can truly and genuinely understand where Jeremiah was coming from.

To **be** a congregation and maintaining God's ministry in this day and age, is not easy, especially when the workers are so few just like it was in Jeremiah's time. Even in our congregation my ministry and our congregation are facing a crisis. Why? Well because we do not have enough people to maintain the ministry in this place.

Currently most groups in this congregation are struggling because there are not enough leaders to lead, enough people to help and not enough people to

make sure the basic needs are taken care of. There is a shortage of leaders to lead the house groups, there is not enough people to help with the youth activities, there is only three people on the rota to help with the projection on Sundays and to get a permanent organist again, who can move the congregation forward with regard to music remains a work in progress. There are so many vacancies with just too few people to help with all the tasks.

I have been confronted with these issues in such a huge way that it slowed my pastoral heartbeat, and clouded my missionary outlook and dampened my spirits. And during all this I was asking myself: Is this a sign of my ministry failing in this place? Is the Lord trying to tell me something?

So I have been begging Him to answer me, to show me the way He wants me to go in the new year. And I feel for the first time in weeks that He did because He is never absent. He is always present, always directing any and every ministry, also mine.

He gave me the answer through the words of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was scared to be in the service of the Lord because according to him he could not speak with authority. So the Lord gave Him authority. The Lord also provided Him with wisdom and knowledge. The Lord assured Him time and time again of His loving presence.

Many people do not want to come forward and be involved because they too feel inadequate, worthless and not gifted to be of any service to the Lord. Many do not feel that they are properly trained to be of any use in the church. Many hear the calling of God but choose to ignore it.

So the answer in short is that we need to listen again to the calling of God and to trust Him. When He calls, He always equips with what is needed to carry out the assigned task. The fact that we are in a pickle is not because God is not in this place but because we as followers are trying to hide from Him. The problem is that we do not trust Him enough to bring out the best in us for a specific task. The truth is that we have become accustomed to the fact that there are always other people to help out, forgetting that they are getting tired.

The bottom line is that more people needs to be encouraged to come forward and share in the many tasks that needs to be done. We are all disciples of Jesus Christ. We need to discover again the gifts and talents that the Lord has given us and start using them to honour Him.

SO if you are sitting in this church and you feel hesitant like Jeremiah remember God is bigger than your fears, and wiser than your inadequacies. God can change you. He can use you. And always remember the words of God to Jeremiah: "They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

I will give each one of you now an opportunity to pray silently

Jesus, you call us and unbind us.

You whisper our names and set us free.

You know our souls and let them live.

You hold our lives and grant them purpose.

You renew our dreams and make them our future.

You transform our living and make us belong.

Loving God of transformations,

with justice you serve us,

and with grace you give us life.

May our turning towards you

be our praise and thanksgiving.

Amen.

If the Lord is pressing you to put your name forward, please do not ignore Him, write down your name and contact details on the welcome card and hand it to me at the end of this service or through my letterbox at the Manse.

The Lord wants me to focus on recruitment and equipment in the year to come and that is what I will do, trusting the Lord to call while bearing in mind the words of Psalm 127:

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."

Amen