

The Lord Has Appointed You  
Jeremiah 1:4-10, 17-19  
January 31, 2016

*Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you."*

Before we get into today's text from the book of Jeremiah, we need a little history lesson. The prophet Jeremiah's ministry stretched over the last 40 years of Judah's history before the Babylonian captivity. God called Jeremiah around 626 B.C.

During the 40 years preceding the Babylonian invasion and captivity, the Israelites living in Judah had become somewhat smug and complacent. They assumed that since Jerusalem was God's holy city, and it contained God's Temple, nothing bad could ever happen to them. They could live their lives as they pleased without regard to what God wanted.

Some false prophets were going around Jerusalem telling the people they had nothing to worry about. They preached peace and safety to the people. But Jeremiah was different. He spoke clearly about the judgment that was coming for Judah. Even when the Babylonians did invade, these false prophets told the people their captivity wouldn't last long. But, it lasted for 70 years.

During his ministry, Jeremiah was threatened, imprisoned, and called a traitor for daring to speak a message contrary to the ideas and hopes of his generation; their form of political correctness. People who speak God's Word against the sin of this world will always be persecuted.

Everything we hear about Jeremiah in this text applies to us 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. Therefore, we are going to look at what transpired between God and Jeremiah so we can recognize these things in our lives.

*Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Je 1:4-5 ESV).*

What a wonderful thing for Jeremiah to hear. God says he knew Jeremiah. This

knowing isn't in some abstract way. This knowing isn't like knowing a set of facts and figures. This knowing is up close and personal. This knowing represents a relationship.

This is the same knowing that God expressed to Moses when he said: *This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name* (Ex 33:17 ESV). And, at the end of Deuteronomy, we read: *There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face* (Dt 34:10 ESV).

God knew Jeremiah. God had a relationship with Jeremiah. God's relationship with Jeremiah didn't begin when Jeremiah came into the world as a cuddly little baby. God says he knew Jeremiah even before he was conceived.

Notice that this knowing is one way. We don't read that Jeremiah knew God before Jeremiah was conceived. God's knowledge of Jeremiah was grace and grace alone. Jeremiah contributed nothing at this point.

As a Christian, Jeremiah has nothing over you. God knows each Christian as an individual, up close and personal. In the letter to the Romans, Paul writes: *We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified* (Ro 8:28-30 ESV).

Preachers, who have been given the special task of sharing God's Word with his people, find encouragement in these verses. But the principles are not limited to pastors. Paul reminds us that God knew every believer before the world began. God knows you just as surely as he knew Jeremiah.

*Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak"* (Je 1:6-7 ESV).

Does Jeremiah's response to the call of God sound familiar? Jeremiah claimed he couldn't answer God's call on his life because he was under qualified. Have you ever used that excuse when God called on you to do his work? Jeremiah claimed he was only a boy and wasn't equipped for this responsibility. We say things like, "I'm too old" "I'm too busy" "I don't have any skills" "I've done my share."

We often fail to see the same thing that Jeremiah missed. God has called you to be his ambassador. You have God's commission on your life. To disagree is to tell God he doesn't know what he's doing.

You must never forget that we are all sinful human beings. That means that none of us are fit to do God's bidding. However, God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called. Just like with Jeremiah, God will provide you with the opportunity, the resources,

and the ability you need to accomplish his purposes. What we carry out into the world isn't our message, it's God's message.

*"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."* (Je 1:8 ESV).

Following God is the scariest thing in the world; it was for Jeremiah and it is for us. The promise God made to Jeremiah is ours, too: *"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."* (Je 1:8 ESV).

The people that God sent Jeremiah to tried to kill him. God prepared Jeremiah in advance by promising his presence and protection. Jesus gives us the same preparation and promise with these words: *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* (Jn 15:19 ESV). *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" (Jn 16:33 ESV).

Like Jeremiah, we are not to be intimidated by the power, wealth, reputation, or position of those who hear our message. God has chosen us, we have God's protection, therefore we have nothing to fear. Remember what Jesus said: *I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!* (Lk 12:4-5 ESV). And Paul sums this up by saying: *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Ro 8:31 ESV).

*Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."* (Je 1:9-10 ESV).

The Lord confirms the call of Jeremiah with this symbolic act. It is similar to when God purified Isaiah's unclean lips by having an angel touch Isaiah's lips with a coal from the altar. But, here, God touches Jeremiah's lips to give him the words God wants him to speak. This is God's final step in qualifying Jeremiah for the work God has in mind for him to do.

Many witness opportunities for our Savior go unfulfilled because the Christian feels he or she doesn't know the right words to say. We forget that no prophet of God ever spoke his own words. Saint Peter tells us: *No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2 Pe 1:21 ESV). And this wasn't just some fantasy that Peter dreamed up. Years before Peter had heard Jesus say: *When they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit* (Mk 13:11 ESV).

God didn't put his words in Jeremiah's heart so he could treasure them and meditate on them. God put his words in Jeremiah's mouth so he could proclaim them. While God wants us to treasure his Word and meditate on it, the point here is clear. God intends for

his people to carry his message of love and salvation into the world.

God also explains that his Word won't set well with everyone: *I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant* (Je 1:10 ESV). Most of the world doesn't like what God has to say and they don't like the people who carry God's Word. This can be very discouraging to those who would witness for Jesus.

However, there are cases where God's Word finds fertile soil in the heart of the unbeliever. The good news for those who receive God's Word comes in the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of Jeremiah. *Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more* (Je 31:31-34 ESV).

Friends, I hope all that I've said helps you to see that, just like Jeremiah, God has known you since before your conception. Just like Jeremiah, God has chosen you. Just like Jeremiah, God has promised to be with you and protect you. Just like Jeremiah, God will give you the words to say when he gives you the opportunity to say them. Just like Jeremiah, God wants you to go boldly into this world and tell everyone about the God who has rescued us from our sins.