

“The Wailing Prophet”

Jeremiah 1:4-10; 7:1-11

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The Rabbis called him the “wailing prophet.”

They said he began weeping the moment
he was born.

Look at his portrait on your bulletin’s cover.

When Michelangelo painted him on the
ceiling of the Sistine Chapel,
he presented Jeremiah in a posture of despair.

Look carefully at him.

He looks like a man who has wept so long,
he has no tears left to shed.

His face is turned to one side
like a boxer who has been battered
by many blows.

His shoulders are hunched forward,
weighted down by the sins of Judah.

His eyes are also cast down,
as if he can no longer bear
to see Gods people suffer.

And his hand covers his mouth
suggesting that he has nothing
left to say.

This is Jeremiah

his story begins like this:

“The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkihah,

of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amor in Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of King Jehoiakin son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah. Until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month (1:1-3).”

This introduction tells us much
about the writer, the great prophet
He was a priest’s son,
his father was Hilkiyah, the priest.
He was born in the village of Anathoth,
close enough to Jerusalem to see its walls,
but situated at the edge of the wilderness
where the terrain begins to slope
downward into the Dead Sea basin.
Jeremiah labored as God’s prophet
for over forty years.
Four decades is a long time
to be a wailing prophet.

Jeremiah lived in an age
where little Judah was buffeted
and bullied by three giant superpowers:
Assyria to the north,
Babylon to the east, and
Egypt to the south
Jeremiah served and suffered through
the reigns of three kings of Judah:
Josiah the reformer, and his sons

Jehoriakim the despot, and
Zedekiah the puppet.
Jeremiah was a prophet during
the cold November winds of
Judah's existence as a nation
right up to the time God's chosen people
were defeated and deported
into Babylonian exile
Jeremiah himself was banished to
Egypt where he died.

Jeremiah's vocation as a prophet
began with a divine call.

Jeremiah writes,

"Now the word of the same 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'" (1:4-5)

The call of Jeremiah as recorded in
the first chapter is rich both
in theological and practical content.

Here are two of them.

We do not choose God before God chooses us.
If you want to know **who** you are,
you have to know **whose** you are.

For us Christians, through our baptism
we belong to Jesus Christ.

For Jeremiah, God chose and consecrated him
to be a prophet before he was born.

Jesus said to his disciples in John's Gospel:

"You did not choose me, I choose you" (15:16a)

And the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians;

“...Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ...” (1:3-4).

Eugene Peterson, the translator of THE MESSAGE, who recently died at the age of 85, offered these practical conclusions about God’s choice of Jeremiah

“My identity does not begin when I understand myself
There is something previous to what I think about myself, and it is what God thinks of me. That means that everything I think and feel is by nature a response, and the one to whom I respond is God. I never speak the first word. I never make the first word.”

Jeremiah was not only set apart for salvation but also vocation. God had work for him to do. The prophet had a mission to accomplish and a message to deliver to his generation. Jeremiah’s unique appointment was to be a prophet to the nations. God intended his ministry to be international in scope. Part of Jeremiah’s calling was to promise God’s grace to the nations proclaiming, “All nations shall gather to... the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem” (3:17).

However, to be a prophet to the nations
also includes announcing God's judgement
By, the time his prophetic ministry came
to its close, Jeremiah had pronounced
divine judgement upon every nation.

Jeremiah's calling is not for everyone.
The first chapter of Jeremiah is mainly
about his call for his times,
not a call for our times.

But you do have your call.
God not only knows you and chooses you.
God has a plan, a mission for your life.
Perhaps you are still trying to figure yours out.
Most Christians, unfortunately,
don't seem to have a clue about
what God has called them to do.
If you are not sure about your calling,
try these suggestions,

First, do everything you already know,
God wants you to do in life.
You cannot expect to be ready for
God's call or even recognize it
unless you are already obeying what
God already revealed to you.
This included the obvious activities
like spending time in worship,
prayer, study, and service.
What do you find yourself doing
for God, the church, and for other people?
Second, ask God in prayer
to reveal his will for your life.
As it is written in the letter of James:

“If any of you are lacking in wisdom,
ask God, who gives to all generously
and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to you” (1:5).

It was not always easy for Jeremiah
to speak God’s words
His commission was not only dangerous;
it was often depressing.

Jeremiah lived at a time of
the unraveling of his nation.

It was a time of spiritual decline
from faith to idolatry to exile.

It is this decline that makes Jeremiah
a prophet for our post-Christian times.

Jeremiah lived in a time much like our own,
when people no longer think that God
matters for their daily lives.

Public life is increasingly dominated by
pagan ideas and rituals.

Even those who claim to be religious
see it as an obligation to be met,
a duty rather than a devotion.

The spiritual problems we experience are
similar to those Jeremiah encountered
2,500 years ago.

Listen to God’s job description for Jeremiah
in verse ten of the first chapter:

“See, today I appoint you over
nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”

This job description contains six tasks,

and four of them are negative.

“To pluck up” is to dig up by the roots
and turn them under or burn them,
is a word Jeremiah used more
than all other Bible writers combined.

“To break down” is to dismantle a
standing structure like knocking down
a city wall or toppling a tower.

“To destroy” speaks for itself and
“to overflow” is to bring to complete ruin.

Once the LORD plucks up, breaks down,
destroys and overthrows,
there is not much left.

There is a great deal of this kind of
judgement throughout Jeremiah’s book.

However, grace will have the last word.

When the nation is plucked up and
plowed under, God will start afresh.

God will “plant” and God will “build.”

God will bring new life out of death.

That was also God’s plan for salvation
through Jesus Christ.

Beloved people of God,

listen again to what Jesus says

to us from John’s gospel

“Destroy this temple, and in three days,

I will raise it up” (2:19).

The temple of Jesus’ body was uprooted
and torn down from the cross

It was destroyed and overthrown
to the gravel.

But God built and planted resurrection
life into the body of Jesus Christ.

God does that for every baptized believer
as Paul wrote in his letters to the Romans:
“Therefore, we have been buried with him
by baptism into death, so that,
just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life.”
If God has done all that for you,
will you go wherever God wants you to go
and say whatever God wants you to say,
even if it turns out to be a dangerous mission?

Amen