

# [ planned servanthood ]

## :: Jeremiah 1.1-10 ::

Pastor Gene is teaching at Calvary Chapel of Tulare this morning, so we are taking a break this week from our verse by verse study through the book of Joshua and will be looking at the opening passage of Jeremiah. Specifically, we're in chapter 1 verses 1 through 10. You can read along as I read them aloud.

### [ read Jeremiah 1.1-10 ]

So there I was, it was November of 2004 and I was sitting with a handful of my fellow political science students in our favorite professor's living room, watching the votes roll in and pestering him about which candidate he endorsed. There was a great anticipation as we watched to see who the nation would select as Commander and Chief.

In a few days we will watch another election unfold and the question that is on everyone's lips is: *What is going to happen?*

*What's going to happen in the elections?*

*What's going to happen with Israel and Iran?*

*What's going to happen to my bank?*

*What's going to happen with the stock market?*

*What's going to happen to the world?*

It's a question that has been asked throughout history and, usually, Christians have been the definitive source for answers. The source of hope and peace.

But, if we're honest, it feels like some Christians are losing their cool, doesn't it? It seems like in many ways even we are being swept away by the fear and the anxiety that we see on every newspaper headline and hear in every special report.

Aside from the regular struggles of life we're bombarded with these other, over-arching issues. Issues which we really can't do anything about, yet have the potential to impact our lives dramatically. And many of us, if we're honest, are worried. We're frightened by the world in which we live.

This morning, God has a message for us. His message is the same as we've been seeing throughout our studies in Joshua: be strong and courageous. It's the same as we've been seeing in our Wednesday night studies in Revelation: trust the Lord. The same message God gave to Abraham and Joseph's brothers and the slaves in Egypt and Joshua and Elijah and Isaiah and Jehoshaphat and Nehemiah's workforce and Ezekiel and Joseph and Mary and Zacharias and the disciples: God's message is **do not be afraid**.

No matter the time or the place or the circumstances, God's message to you is one of grace and peace. Of hope and protection.

There were few times more tumultuous in the Bible than the time of the Kings. After Solomon's reign the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. As a faithful Jew living in the promised land, you didn't know what was going happen from day to day. You didn't know when you woke up in the morning whether an enemy would be laying siege to your city, or if a famine had struck the land. You didn't know if your king was going to be faithful to God or if was going to be terribly wicked. Frankly, you didn't even know how long your king would last. Some reigned for decades, some for only days. It was a time of incredible difficulty and trial.

That is context in which we find our passage this morning. We find Jeremiah, Judah's final prophet before the captivity. And this morning God's word will show us how to face an uncertain world. A difficult world. A frightening world. Because God came to Jeremiah, His faithful servant, and spoke to Him on these issues. And this morning you and I are Jeremiah and we will find God's encouragement and guidance as we look to the message He sent to this famous prophet. Because understand this: no matter our circumstances or struggles, no matter the time or place in which we live, **we have hope**. We have God's word and we have God's Spirit, and we are called to be people of peace. People of joy. People of confidence.

Friends, the word of God has come to us and the power of God dwells within us. This morning I plainly state to you that God does not want us to be afraid or anxious or worried. Our Lord is reigning in heaven and He has ordained and anointed **you** to be a minister of the Gospel of grace. Though the times are, in a natural sense, uncertain, we have a sure foundation in God. We are victorious in God. We are commanded to be strong and courageous and to have no fear because God's perfect love casts out fear.

We will see the kind of God we serve as we look at the 10 verses of this passage.

**Jeremiah 1.1 - The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.**

The first thing we discover about Jeremiah was that he was of the priestly line. As we see farther down, he was a young man. Now, a descendent of Aaron was eligible to officially become a priest at the age of 30, so we can determine that Jeremiah was in training. He hadn't completed his studies yet, he was still becoming the man God wanted him to be.

You and I are people who are being continually conformed into the image of Christ. And before we go on we need to meditate on that for a moment. If you are a believer, then God has determined to do a work in your heart. He has determined to mold you more and more into a useful vessel, into the image of His Son. He has determined to use you to bring glory to Himself. **You are a part of His plan.**

I think that sometimes we focus more on the distance we *still need to go* rather than the work that has *already been done*. What I mean by that is within our hearts sometimes we get the idea that we're not ready yet. We're not prepared enough yet. We're not trained enough to be used of God. You hear that call from God or you feel that nudge from the Spirit but you think, 'I'm no priest. I'm no missionary.'

But God came to Jeremiah in his youth. He came to him with a **message** and a **mission** at the time the *people* needed it most. While there is always further for us to go, we need to remind ourselves that the time for people around us to hear the Gospel is **now**. Right now. There is always more we *could* learn, but **now** is the time for us to share Christ's love with the lost and dying world.

Jeremiah 1.2-3 - To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, the king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It also came 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 carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah throughout the reigns of these kings. The first insight we discover is that God's word outlives the generations of man. It is supreme and it is above culture or era or nation or society. It is pure and it is eternal. God's word outlived Josiah and Jehoiakim and Zedekiah and Jeremiah and it will outlive you and I, should the Lord tarry. It is permanent as is its power and truth and effectiveness. If you are looking to answer the great questions of life, you should look to the Bible, which is inspired and inerrant and has been delivered to us by the Almighty that we might understand how to live our lives and how to assist in saving the lives of others.

But we also find a great contrast in these verses. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah during the reign of Josiah; a time of great reform and a time when the nation of Judah was getting back on track and away from idol worship.

God's word also came during the time of Jehoiakim; a time of great evil and wickedness and apostasy.

It also came during the reign of Zedekiah; a time of great oppression and calamity, a time of brokenness and struggle.

The encouragement for us this morning is simple. No matter what is happening in the world around us, we can find comfort and strength and guidance in the Word of God, because God's word is eternal. There we find the answers to our questions and the directions for how to live in a time of blessing, or in a time of wickedness, or in a time of struggle. Because no matter the time, God's word will come and it will speak with power both devotionally and practically.

Not only do we have God's word, but we have God Himself. We serve a King who is aware of our situations and circumstances, and not just aware of them, but active *in* them. We see God's nature and character as we look at the calling of Jeremiah in verse 4.

Jeremiah 1.4-5 - Then the word of the Lord came to **me** saying: before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born I sanctified you. I ordained you as a prophet to the nations.

Don't you love God? The very first thing He has to say to Jeremiah, this man who would minister for 40 years without a single recorded conversion, a man who would have to witness and endure the siege and captivity of Jerusalem, a man who, from an earthly perspective, had much to fear, the very first thing God says to this guy is, 'I know you. I love you. I have a plan for you. I am with you.'

God's first message to Jeremiah was about what He had already done for him. Think about what God has done for you today, yesterday, this week, throughout your life, before you were born. From

the faithfulness of the sunrise to Christ's work on the cross, all of it was done *for you*. And when we stop to consider what God has done we understand how trustworthy He is.

**Jeremiah 1.6 - Then said I: Ah Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.**

Jeremiah was reluctant. It's not that he was unfaithful or even unwilling, it was that he was fearful. He was worried. He was unsure. He was feeling that uncertainty that many people are expressing today.

Before we see God's response, we should stop and consider this: there is always an excuse to shy away from what God wants us to do. Jeremiah was like Moses who said, 'I can't confront Pharaoh...I stutter. I don't speak well.' He was like Saul who said, 'I can't lead the nation...I'm from the lowliest tribe of Israel and the lowliest family in the tribe.' He was like Zacharias who said, 'I can't have a baby, I'm an old man!'

We're this way too. We're prone to making excuses. Even legitimate ones! There may be incredible circumstances or difficulties in your life. But the exhortation to us this morning is that we should never be afraid to demonstrate our faith and the love we have found in Christ and the hope that we have. We should never be afraid to take part in the work that the Lord has planned for us. Because our lives aren't about our personal abilities. It's not about **our** answers to life's problems. It's about God's power and God's answers and God's plan.

Look at what the Lord says to Jeremiah in verse 7:

**Jeremiah 1.7-8 - But the Lord said to me: do not say 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.**

When God comes to us we're prone to make excuses. God is gracious to help us through those excuses, but we need to understand that they slow down God's work.

The Lord, in His infinite love and wisdom, has determined that you and I will be His representatives on the earth, the ministers of the Gospel. Not angels. Not resurrected saints. Not floating orbs of light. You and I.

An even more astounding fact is that God is willing to struggle with us, even when we rebel or are reluctant. That is an amazing thought. When we aren't 100% faithful, God is not only willing to forgive us, but He's willing to put His work on hold so that He can bring us along.

Think of Jonah. God called him, gave him an assignment and then Jonah rebelled. Plain, simple rebellion. But God put His work on hold so that He could bring Jonah along and develop him.

Think of Gideon. God picked him to deliver the people. But Gideon was afraid. He was a doubter. And so God had to put His plan on hold for a few days while He demonstrated His power to Gideon.

When we look at God's message to Jeremiah we get this same sense. He comes and calls Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a bit reluctant and God says, 'sorry Jerry, *this* is the plan. This is *who you are*. This is what I've prepared for you.'

And here we have to stop and apply this to our lives. Because, listen, above all things this morning we need to remember that God has a plan and a purpose for His people.

Here's my basic summary of that plan: God says to His people, 'I am God. I have known you since before the foundations of the earth. I formed you in your mother's womb. I chased you down and revealed my love and my salvation to you. Now I'm taking you and I'm changing you into this beautiful vessel. I will never leave you or forsake you. I'm preparing a place for you, but meanwhile I've sent you a Helper, the Holy Spirit. Together you and I are going to go into Judea and Samaria and all the world to make disciples and to spread the Gospel of grace. Together we are going to confound the world and we are going to be more than conquerors in every situation. This is the plan. That is who you are.'

That's the plan. And so despite our circumstances, despite our imperfection, God comes and says, 'let's go. Let's go do this together.' Like we just read in verses 7 and 8, God says, 'I'll give you the **time**, I'll give you the **place**, I'll give you the **words**, I'll give you the **endurance** and the **strength**, but I want it to be you. I want you to do this with Me and I want you to not be afraid.'

The Lord even goes one better than that. We read in verse 9:

**Jeremiah 1.9 - Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.**

Usually we read the prophets and envy them. We read about these visions and these encounters with God and we're like, 'wow...*that* would be powerful. That would be a *real* spiritual experience.'

But we need to adjust our thinking. I mean this sincerely. Because we are visual people and we think to ourselves, 'yeah I could do a lot things if God took me to heaven and show me around.' But understand this: *we are the ones to be envied*. Because not only has God reached out to us (1 Corinthians 14), not only has God touched our mouths and given us His word (Luke 12:12), but He has knocked on the very door of our heart and then He cleaned up the place and moved in!

If you are a Christian here this morning, the Spirit of the Living God, the Third Person of the Trinity lives within you. He is **with** you.

We serve a God who is personal and affectionate. Our God *touches* people. Our God embraces people. Our God is romantic and relational.

Just look at this passage. 5 times in 9 verses we read that God spoke to Jeremiah. What we need to understand is that God desires to speak to us all the time. From morning 'til evening. In your devotions and in your rest. At your church and at your workplace. In prayer or in line at the movies, God is speaking, and He is speaking to you a message of love and of grace and of hope and of power. And He wants you to share that message to the people around you.

To Jeremiah He said in verse 10:

**Jeremiah 1.10 - See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.**

And here we get to the culmination of God's personal message to Jeremiah. Because He says, 'it doesn't matter what your personal situation is. It doesn't matter what the national or global situation is, because I've set you above that.' Jeremiah was above the nation, he was above the kings, because there was a deeper working going on: a spiritual work. God's plan for Jeremiah was to spread the message of salvation to people who desperately needed it.

These 10 verses give incredible insight into who God is. They demonstrate His love and His attitudes and His plans.

So what's the point?

The point is that we, as God's people, should be beacons of peace in a frightened world. We should be secure in our hope and in our trust in God.

If you are worried or fearful or anxious, I can say with great certainty that God does not want you to be. God has made you a victorious conquerer. God has prepared you for the time and the place that He has you and God has selected **you** to be His representative of grace and salvation to the people around you.

I know that we live in a difficult world. The problems facing us as individuals and families and as a nation and as a planet are serious. It may feel as though we have enemies at the gate, waiting to carry us away.

But to that God says to us what He said in Isaiah:

Isaiah 46.3-4 - Listen to Me, O house of Jacob and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made and I will bear; Even I will carry and will deliver you.

God is carrying us. **He is carrying us.** And despite any circumstances, the Lord says that we can choose to overcome fear or worry or anxiety. He has said that we must walk and speak and live victoriously because He has prepared for us work to do.

When we look through the Bible we find many people who lived in difficult times. And each time we see that God sent them a message of courage and hope and provision.

God desires that you and I be like Noah, a man who built an ark and offered a place of refuge from the storm.

God desires that you and I be like Esther, who trusted God to protect her and boldly stood as an advocate for her countrymen.

God desires that you and I be like Daniel, who chose to honor God and follow His will despite the earthly consequences that threatened him.

God desires that we be like Naaman's servant girl, a captive from Israel, but still faithful to share her faith, even with her captor.

God desires that we be like the man who owned the upper room and kept it prepared and ready for the use of the Master.

God desires we be like Obadiah or Jude, men who faithfully wrote a few words, but whose have been used to minister to countless millions.

God desires that we be disciples who are ready for God to speak and willing to do whatever He asks us to. Ready to speak to anyone He brings us to. Ready to share our hope and our peace and our certainty that God is love and He is in control.

You are a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ has overcome death and sin. He sits at the right hand of God the Father and is actively equipping and directing you. He can handle a few economic problems. A few political problems.

We are people of hope and not of desperation. We are people of certainty, not anxiety. We are people of victory. Go out this morning and defy the world with the power that Christ has put within you.