

Lessons from the life of Jeremiah (Taking a stand for truth).

Readings/Text: Jeremiah 1 & 20

In *'The Lord of the Rings'* Frodo, the Hobbit, is in possession of the ring.
He wants to destroy it...because of its hold over people...Including himself.

As he holds the ring, Gandalf, the Wizard, tells him the only way it can be destroyed is for it to be thrown into the cracks of doom in Fire Mountain.

Frodo cries out, 'I do really want to destroy it!...Or, well, have it destroyed.
I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?'

Gandalf replies, 'Such questions cannot be answered. You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.' (p60).

I know how that feels.

You have been chosen to do something...

and you don't feel that you have the ability to do it.

Jeremiah knew that feeling all too well...

chosen to do something...but feeling unable/inadequate.

What can we learn from Jeremiah?

The chapters we read show at a glance some aspects of Jeremiah's life.

Chapter 1: We see that he bases his mission firmly on the Word of God alone.

Chapter 20: we see how his lifestyle was one of being willing to suffer for the sake of that prophetic word.

He put the Word of God before all else, even his own comfort and safety.

Setting the scene.

Jeremiah was a priest from the tribe of Benjamin...who also became a prophet.

A prophet in the last days of the kingdom...

Before God destroyed it.

Centuries before, David was established as king over Israel,

with the promise that a descendant would always be on the throne.

But there were conditions of obedience attached to the earthly promise.

After David's son Solomon died the kingdom split.

The 10 northern tribes took the name Israel, under king Jeroboam.

The 2 southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin,

became the kingdom of Judah under Rehoboam.

Israel, the northern kingdom, sinned against the Lord.

Worshipping the Lord in ways they were told not to...even other gods.
Through prophets God called them to repentance...but they wouldn't listen.

All the kings were evil, except one...and he wasn't much good either.

God finally brought on them the condemnation they deserved.
721BC the Assyrians came and destroyed the Northern kingdom.

They deported the people as slaves to other parts of their kingdom.
And settled non-Jews in the area.

Now all that was left was the 2 southern tribes.

They continued till around 600BC, and the time of Jeremiah.
Now they too faced judgement, this time at the hands of the Babylonians.

The boiling pot in Jeremiah 1 is the image of those Babylonians sweeping down from the north to destroy them.

Here we see the God is sovereign over even the political affairs of the world.
The Babylonians, a mighty world power, thought they were overrunning nations under their power, extending their empire.
But the reality is they are pawns in a much bigger cosmic scene.

God would use them to bring judgement on Judah...

Jeremiah knew from the outset that God was in control...

Because God told him.

Look at verse 4 & 5...before I formed you in the womb I knew you, set apart, appointed.

God is in control...he knew the plans he had for Jeremiah...

Even before he was born!

These words remind us that God is deeply involved in the formation of every human being from conception.

As Rick Warren says, 'God don't make junk.'

This is great comfort.

God knew you and me before we were born.

He knew us, loved us and was part of every stage of our development.

The gifts and talents you have were carefully nurtured by God,
even as you developed.

This means that you and I can be glad about who we are.

We are the people God intended us to be.

With our gifts and talents we bring God glory.

Even though Jeremiah knew God was in control...that didn't make it any easier.

As we glance through the pages of Jeremiah, we learn something of the price that he paid because of his commitment to God.

His message was so unpopular that some people conspired to kill him (11:18-20).

Others tried to neutralise his influence by slandering him..

They say, 'Let's attack him with our tongues.'

He was imprisoned, his life threatened by the king.

He was accused of treason, and considered a national disgrace.

Still others ridiculed him as a faithful prophet.

See 20:7-8.

'I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me...so the Word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.'

The picture sounds very much like that of many people persecuted today!

None of this was easy for the sensitive prophet, known as the weeping prophet.

He cries out in chapter 20, 'Cursed be the day I was born!'

If we have faith in Christ, God chose us, just like Jeremiah, for a special task.

It is a task that God calls us to, not just as individuals, but as his church.

God said to Jeremiah, in verse 5, "I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

And in verse 9, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See today I appoint you over the nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

How did God do that?

Did Jeremiah become a great ruler and lead a mighty army and conquer cities and kings?

No, on the contrary, he was thrown into cisterns by kings.

How was he to do this?

God said, "See, I have put my word in your mouth."

And friends, the wonderful truth is, that in Christ God has given us that same privilege.

When we declare the word of God to the world in obedience to Christ's command, God gives us spiritual power to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Listen to what Jesus told his disciples.

Matthew 28 18: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Well, how do we uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow, the power of the world?

The bible says in 1 Corinthians 10, 4 and 5, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

We must, by our life and words, breakdown every excuse that people have for not believing in Christ.

We must also build something in its place.
And God gives us power to do that.

What are the weapons and tools we use?
Faith, prayer, love, and the Word of God.

Do you want your unconverted friends to know Christ?
Then **pray** for them,
show them your faith by your godly lifestyle,
and **speak** to them about the Word of God.
Tell them the gospel.

To do that, you need to know the gospel.
If your non-Christian friend asked you what it means to be a Christian, could you give a clear and concise answer? If you can't, then you need to learn how you can.

There are many good books, like John Chapman's 'Know and Tell the Gospel', that will help you with that.
Come to me after the service and I'll give you some help.

But for most of us, I don't think that's the main impediment is it?
I think our main problem is the same one Jeremiah had.

I'll bet that when I mentioned our obligation in evangelism just then, your mind automatically began to go through possible reasons for not speaking to people about Jesus. Am I right?

What did Jeremiah the prophet say when God told him he would speak to the nations? "**Ah sovereign Lord, I am only a child, I do not know how to speak!**"

When God called Jeremiah he was likely a young man in his early 20s...
He felt terribly vulnerable and inadequate.

He surely had his reasons.
Jeremiah grew up during the reign of Manasseh,

who had murdered many pious men.
He was young and untested, unsure of himself.

The future prophet's objections was exposed as an excuse,
as if was using his sense of weakness as an excuse to refuse God's call.
God responded...you must go.

But that was also accompanied with a promise...I am with you and will rescue you.

God will be with you as you serve him, despite your weaknesses,
and despite any fears you might have.

The Lord said, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will be with you,"
declares the Lord."

Why did God tell him not to be afraid?
Because he was afraid...And so am I...And so are you.

We are afraid that people will treat us badly when we speak the word of God,
because we know that the world rejects God.
We know that it will reject us if we identify ourselves with God.

Admit it. You're afraid, aren't you?
I am. I'm afraid people will misunderstand me.
I'm afraid they will ridicule me, call me a fanatic.
Persecute me and ostracise me.

But what does God say?
He will be with us.
God's presence with us is more real and of infinite more worth than the approval of
the world. Don't be afraid, says God, for I am with you.

Paul said the same thing in that reading from Timothy, didn't he? "For God did not
give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do
not be ashamed to testify about our Lord."

Perhaps we may be afraid that the gospel won't work.
That we'll make a fool of ourselves.
But again, God says to Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth," and "I am
watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

The gospel is powerful. It works.
People get saved.

Because God is sovereign, he will save those he calls, whether you are obedient to his
command to tell the gospel or not. It is you who will miss out if you don't. Jeremiah 1
verse 17: "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command

you...They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord."

This last line points us to some things God says in the book of Revelation:

Chapter 2, verse 27: "to him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations."

Chapter 3 verse 12: "him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God"

Chapter 3 verse 21: "to him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with the Father on his throne."

And then in chapter 17 we see the vision of the godless world opposing Jesus the Lamb of God, and in verse 13 and 14 we read, "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

The word of God is powerful.

In Jeremiah's time, in our time, in all times until the end of the age.

God's Word is powerful.

Believe it, live by it, and be faithful followers of Christ, as you try every way you can to tell the people of your world what God has commanded you to say.

Get yourself ready

Jeremiah was about to set out on a great adventure...like Frodo in Lord of the Rings.

He had been called to live...not by the standards, values and beliefs of society...

But by God's word.

He had been called to proclaim that word...whatever the cost might be to him personally.

Jeremiah had to prepare himself...to commit himself to God's way.

You and I are challenged to make the same commitment.

We are not to drift through life...

believing in God...but living like people of the world.

We are to take a stand as Jeremiah did.

And that challenge comes with the promise...I am with you.

Like Jeremiah, we are called to a greater purpose in life than being comfortable here on earth.

We are called to become God's mouthpieces, proclaiming Christ's love, grace, and redemption to the world.

Are you willing to do that?