

Title: The Calling of a Prophet

Text: Jeremiah 1:1-19

Focus: The difficulty in responding to God's call to ministry comes when we fail to rely on his promises to help us overcome our inadequacies and the temptation to fear the present and future challenges.

Function: To inspire my hearers to trust God's ability to help them rise to the challenges of ministry.

## **Introduction**

### **What**

Last week the country elected a new president. Whether you are a Republican, Democrat or Independent, and whether your candidate was elected or not, you and I have to admit that politically and socially we are in the midst of an extraordinary moment in American history. Thousands of people across continents in parks, on streets and even in church sanctuaries wept, hugged and danced in celebration when the first African American was elected president of the United States. Those who have followed this long campaign both in the primaries and post conventions will agree with me that not one single candidate

male or female raised the issue that they were inadequate, unprepared, lacked the experience to take over the most powerful job on this planet. Although, I might say, their opponents did not fail to make such caricatures. Unlike the political candidates, Jeremiah was not very eager to promote his candidacy to be a prophet. His ads were not flooding the airways promoting his rescue plan for the nation of Judah. The truth of the matter is that, when God called on Jeremiah he said no. Jeremiah said no because he knew he could not do the job. It is foolish to accept a job you know you cannot do. You are opening yourself up to embarrassment.

The job Jeremiah refused was to be a prophet. A prophet is one who is both deeply rooted in God consciousness, almost obsessed with him and the reality of the present condition, the now. A prophet is one who is alive with God, one who breathes and pulsates with the very life of God, but also one who is grounded in the reality of every day troubles and inhumanities facing their people. The work of a prophet is to call people to live right, to live well to be human. But it is more than a call to say something it is a call to live out the message.

### **So What**

Unlike the self assurance of modern day politicians, Jeremiah said to God I am only a child and I cannot speak. Unmoved by Jeremiah's desire to back away, God will help Jeremiah get it together by refusing his excuses and giving him two compelling visions that will shape his ministry for the next forty years.

## **The Excuse of Inadequacy and God's Provision**

### **Verses 6-10**

We are practiced in pleading our inadequacies in an effort to avoid living the life that God has for us. The excuses are endless: I am only a layman, I am only a housewife, I am not smart enough, I did not do well in Biblical Interpretation or any of the God courses, principles of public speaking was a nightmare for me. Almost sounds like Moses.

(Exodus 4:10)

Jeremiah could no more hold on to his excuses as you and I are today. God touched his mouth and presented him a vision path for his ministry. God validated and authenticated Jeremiah's call by delineating for him some very important aspects of his life vocation. I have put my words in your mouth and today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to **uproot and tear down**, to **destroy and overthrow**, to **build and to plant**. The three pairs of verbs are all-involving. In the way of faith we do not escape because it is too much for us; we plunge into it because God calls us, commands us and equips us. It is not our feelings and our experience that determines our level of participation rather it is God that decides about us. Whoever God calls he also qualifies. I find it amazing that by the time we come to the end of the chapter Jeremiah is no longer inadequate. We are given a most fascinating picture of him. He is made a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall. Some of you are here tonight feeling less sure of the future than when you first arrived, you are saying to yourself, "I am far from being a fortified city, I am being

ravaged by doubt and feelings of inadequacy. I am struggling to stay in school. I am struggling to keep my family together. I am no iron pillar, as a matter of fact I am falling apart, at times I am even resentful and down right angry with God for putting me and my family in this situation. I am no bronze wall, in fact I often feel weak and vulnerable to old habits and occasionally tempted to give up. Well, my dear friend you are in good company because we've all been there. A prophet is one who is obsessed with God and lives in the now. God gave Jeremiah two visions one to nourish his soul in the divine promise of anticipation and the other to help him understand the parameters placed on the evil challenges of the time.

### **The Vision of the Almond Branch**

#### **Verses 11-12**

The almond tree is one of the earliest trees to bloom in Palestine. Before it puts forth leaves it puts forth blossoms, white like cotton or here in Colorado, snow. What do you see Jeremiah? "I see the branch of an **almond** tree." "Good! You have seen correctly, for I am **watching** to see that my word is fulfilled." The vision of the blossom is a sign of promise, it is a sign of anticipation of good things to come. It is the sign that spring is around the corner, things will be turning green, birds will migrate back, flowers will break forth and explode in magnificent colors. It is the message of hope that God will keep his word, what he announces he will fulfill. Like Jeremiah you and I can nourish our lives in God's grand promise of watching over his word. Like a shepherd who watches his sheep God watches his word and not one will be lost. The vision is accented with a

word play, a kind of audio visual if you please. The word almond and the word watching are almost identical in Hebrew. The word almond is *shaged* and the word watching is *shoqed*. A visual image joined to an auditory pun trained Jeremiah in hope. Every spring for the rest of his life the sight of the almond blossom, like the cherry blossoms in Washington DC, would trigger the sound *shoqed* (watching) in his memory. “I am watching over my word to perform it.” It would also be true that every time he heard the word watching (*shoqed*) the visual image of the almond branch would release all the energy of the prospects of spring in him. The imagery of the blossoming almond branch coupled with God’s promise of watching over his word forms a powerful vision for any life whether you are called to be a prophet or not. However, there is one further vision that will shape Jeremiah’s call.

### **The Vision of the Boiling Pot**

#### **Verses 13-16**

“What do you see?” “I see a boiling pot tilting away from the north.” It was no secret to anyone living during that period that the ominous threat of Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires were stretching their shadows towards Judah. Jeremiah was being called at a time of great uncertainty for his beloved nation. The vision, however, would be a lesson to Jeremiah and to us as well that in spite of the difficulties that may fall on a people or nation God sets the parameters as to its extent. The boiling pot tilted towards Jerusalem and the prophets own village of Anathoth was in the direct path of the predicted

judgment. However, Jeremiah would know that the unfolding events were not catastrophic, that it would have a beginning but also an ending. Jeremiah was taught that he need not be intimidated by evil because God is still sovereign. Yes, we will wrestle with the world's evil but not consumed by it or afraid of it because it is controlled evil.

## **Now What**

### **Conclusion**

After forty years of ministry Jeremiah fulfilled God's call upon his life. It was not without hardship and suffering, but he never lost sight of the one who had called him. He lived well, he loved well, he experienced the surge and energy of walking with God. The vision of the almond blossom was forever riveted in his daily consciousness, that God kept watch over his word. The vision of the boiling pot was a reminder of the evil in the world but always a controlled evil. He was indeed a fortified city, an iron pillar and a wall of bronze. I want to challenge you tonight to give God your fears, your doubts, your feelings of inadequacy and all your excuses. Get obsessed with him, experience a new aliveness; capture the vision of the almond blossom and the boiling pot. Plan to stay the course, graduate, pass the God courses, master biblical interpretation, engage public speaking, learn that instrument and give your self the opportunity of a lifetime.