

October 27, 2013

Church of the Nazarene

# God is Always Previous

Jeremiah 1:4-10

I chose the book of Jeremiah for today. It is a tough book, but I think you can handle it :-)  
Jeremiah was a prophet of God to Judah (the southern kingdom) during some rather hard times. His ministry ranged from the reign of King Josiah (the youngest king and a good king who led a revival for God) through to the Babylonian captivity and destruction of Jerusalem.

Have you ever felt that The Lord was directing you to do something? You feel like you can't lose - God directed it. However, when you take on the mission things just don't work well at all. What do you do? Most people bail out on the mission assuming they must have heard wrong for surely God would cause what He directs to be successful.

What has God called you to do? How's that working for you? Do you see success or opposition? Are you frustrated? Are you considering bailing out and finding something else to do for God? What is The Lord saying to you during this time of doubt and fear? What will you do next? Are you sure you heard Him correctly in the first place?

Many of us grew up with the commercial about E.F. Hutton - and when E. F. Hutton speaks ... Everyone listens. Well Jeremiah had the opposite effect on the people of his time, even his very own countrymen whom he was so burdened for. However, when he spoke the very words of God to them - to help them - to get them to repent and turn back to their God and be saved from the pending doom, they ignored him and persecuted him.

Jeremiah was about 20 when he began his public prophetic ministry for God, and he ministered for about 40 years. In all that time, he didn't have one situation that we could call a win, a success. How long could you go on doing what you thought God called you to do and never once realize a good result for your efforts and prayers and diligence?

*"There are many profiles in courage throughout the Old and New Testaments: men and women who took a courageous, costly stand for God. Perhaps the most courageous of all was the prophet Jeremiah." (Adventuring Through the Bible - Ray C. Stedman).*

Let's look at what gave Jeremiah such courage, such diligence, such drive in his ministry...

READ: Jeremiah 1:4-10

*"Jeremiah's life didn't start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah's salvation didn't start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah's truth didn't start with Jeremiah. He entered the world in which the essential parts of his existence were already ancient history.*

***So do we!***

*Our identity doesn't begin with us. There's something previous to what we think about ourselves, and that something is what God thinks of us. This means that everything we think and feel is by nature a response. And the one to whom we respond is God. We never speak the first word. We never make the first move.*

*God is always previous."* (The Message - Study Bible, Eugene Peterson).

I want to examine this passage in more detail...

***v. 4 - The Lord gave me this message:***

No person told this to Jeremiah. He didn't think it or tell it to himself. He knew The Lord gave him this message. It was an important message, but more it was the Lord's message to him. Knowing this was from The Lord gave Jeremiah the stamina he would need to carry out the call of God as he moved forward - in the face of persecution, arrest, scorn from his friends and enemies.

Is whatever you are doing for The Lord a result of hearing Him speak His direction to you for the Kingdom of God? We can get involved in all kinds of good things for God, but what has He actually directed you to do for Him. What is His call on your life? Do you know you have a specific thing that God has created you for? A task, a ministry, a way of life, a plan, something you know came directly from God. If you don't have a handle on that, are you willing to seek him to find out what it is He has called you to - what He created you for?

## **God's Calling -**

***v. 5a - I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb.***

We use this verse to prove to people that life begins in the womb. We use it to fight against abortion. We use it to say that God is involved in conception and the life of a fetus. It is God who formed us - created us - in pregnancy through birth process. But this passage continues...

***v. 5b - Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.***

Not only did God form us in the womb, but He also appointed us to a calling before we were born! Does that do anything to you? It helps me understand a lot of things about myself if I really dig deeper and pray to understand why I am the way I am and do what I do, etc.

God has created each of us with a specific call or ministry or role to play in our lives. We can learn what that is and pursue it, or we can put it aside and never accomplish God's best for our lives. Unbelievers will never realize the awesomeness of this concept. Some may stumble upon it in their search for a career, but they will never realize that God has instilled this in them from before they were born. For believers, it is a most sobering and yet fulfilling revelation.

We are born with a purpose in life that God designed in each of us. We are set apart and appointed by God for that purpose in life. It is a purpose for God and His Kingdom. Will we seek Him, obey Him, and trust Him enough to find out what that purpose is? OR - Like Israel, turn away from following Him to worship the idols of this world trying for "success" on our own?

Idols like: lust, greed, success, acceptance, pride, fame, riches, prestige, etc. have always been around to distract a person from pursuing God's best for your life.

## **Excuses -**

***v. 6 - O Sovereign Lord, I can't speak for you! I'm too young!***

Why do we make excuses why we can't do what God called us to do? There are several examples in Scripture of the same problem - Moses rings out as a common example - I can't speak for you Lord. I stutter - I am not eloquent. No matter how much God reassured him, he

was adamant about his short-comings. I can't serve you that way Lord; I'm afraid to speak in public - I can't stand crowds - I am not bold enough - I have too many issues in my life - Please, Lord, send someone else! Jeremiah said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!"

**God's Response - *Don't say that!***

***v. 7 - The Lord replied, Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you.***

God's answer to Jeremiah - *don't say that* - Don't say any of the things you have thought or said as a excuse to God for not doing what He has called you to do. Don't say that!

He said it to Moses and to Jeremiah, and He's saying to all of us today too. It's not about you! It's about my purposes that I am calling you to partner with me in. I will be with you. You can't fail. I can't fail, and I'm in this thing with you. I will go before you to prepare the way. This is my thing, not yours. Just obey and trust Me to make it succeed. You can't lose!

We are called by God to go where He sends us and to say whatever He tells us to say. But - we ask - what will He ask us to say, and how will I know what to say. This is fear and fear can cripple our success. Success is not measured by the results of our calling, but by whether we move on our call or not. God is in charge of the results, not us.

***v. 8 - And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, The Lord, have spoken!***

This is a command from God. Do not be afraid of the people. Man, this was a big deal for me. I was paranoid to be in front of people, and I couldn't never speak before people. I was a basket case in public. I learned to hide behind some humor, but down inside I was a wreck.

God said to me, "I will be with you and will protect you." I so needed protection. Thank you Lord for being with me and protecting me. You have never let me down all these years.

***v. 9 - The The Lord reached out and touched my mouth and said, "Look, I have put my words in your mouth!"***

Jeremiah didn't have to worry about what he would say. God gave him His words to speak to the nation. Still they would not hear; they would not head the words of God through Jeremiah. He spoke of a new thing that God was going to do for a people that would yield to Him, but they

wouldn't hear it. Jeremiah spoke to them about this to come in the future where God would work by His Spirit in the hearts of true believers, but they shut their ears.

Jesus told his disciples, and us too, ...***Don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking - it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt. 10:19,20).***

Jeremiah didn't have the advantage of hearing those words the way we do, but he never faltered in his call to bring God's word to a nation in rebellion against God. They suffered miserably for it. Jeremiah never saw any success to his obedience or to his accuracy in conveying God's word to his countrymen. However, he never wavered in his faith and obedience.

He knew God had called him, and that was enough for him to stay on track in spite of the opposition and seeming failure. He was a success in God's eyes, and that's all that matters. Isn't it? When it all comes down to it - what is success? Isn't it being faithful to what God has called us to do for Him and the Kingdom in spite of the odds?

Jeremiah's mission was to warn Jews and all nations of God's impending judgment against sin. This was a harsh message to a rebellious people. They didn't tolerate it well. However, God didn't promise to insulate us from hardships even when following His call on our lives. He does promise to go with us through the pain and suffering and persecution if it comes upon us.

***v. 10 - Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant.***

You may not know what God has called you to - yet. All you know is that He called you to a purpose in life before you were born. Will you seek him and be obedient to that call no matter what comes as a result of following The Lord?

Will you rest in the assurance that He is with you and will remain with you? That He will protect you in the way no matter what it looks like? That He will never leave you or forsake you? That in Him you will succeed - no matter what! Be strong and courageous in The Lord. There is really nothing to fear - so rest in His peace and obey His call on your life.

You don't need to agonize over what your purpose and direction is in The Lord. If you are following Him and working for the Kingdom right now, you are probably fulfilling your call.

This is the thing that you can't get out of your thoughts; it's what you are burdened to do; you can't walk away from it; you don't measure your success or failure - you just have to do it.