

- We are going to be in the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah today.
 - If you have ever had a job evaluation, filled out an online survey about yourself, tried to get a job, you have had to fill out one of the questions that forces you to rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 about something in particular.
 - Almost universally, we rate ourselves tougher than we would rate someone else if we were doing their evaluation, particular for people we care about.
 - So let me ask you, on a scale of 1-10, how adequate are you? Your response would probably be, it depends on what you are asking I am adequate about.
 - So let me ask it this way, how frequently do you feel inadequate?
 - We spend out entire lives trying to prove our adequacy. Social media exists and flourishes so we can show people the best side of us, even if it's how good we are at being bluntly honest with all our own failings.
 - Every single person struggles with feelings of inadequacy. We are not even living up to our own expectations, let alone God's. You have been closeted with your young kids for two weeks now and you cannot wait for them to go back to school and somewhere in the back of your mind you wonder if you really are as good a parent as you thought you were.
 - You have been working from home and now you have less and less to do and you wonder about your value and worth (read adequacy) to your employer.
 - And what happens when we bring that into our relationship with God. If you've like me, you can often feel inadequate. Inadequate to help others. Inadequate to live well. Inadequate to teach or lead.
 - Jeremiah had these same issues. He brought them up with God. And how God answered him gives me (and I hope you) tremendous hope. Because **God has appointed you to make a difference.**
 - God has called you to something bigger than yourself, and it doesn't matter who you are, when you follow Jesus, this is true of you. You have a purpose. You get to make an impact that is bigger than you might imagine. And your feelings of inadequacy do not determine or change this truth.
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- So who is Jeremiah? (And no, he was not a bullfrog who is a good friend)
 - More is written in Scripture about Jeremiah than any other prophet. He is considered to be the author of much of the book of Jeremiah as well as the book of Lamentations.
 - Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of 5 different kings, beginning with Josiah and ending with Zedekiah.
 - He was one of the major prophets during a time when God's judgment was about to fall on Judah. He started his ministry about 30-40 years before Babylon conquered Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah, so from around 630 to 585 B.C.E.
 - A prophet's role in the nation of Israel was to be God's voice to the people. There were often multiple prophets in service to the king and the nation. They were frequently advisors to the king. They were a voice for the people in the corridors of power. Most importantly, they were supposed to be God's voice and representative to instruct and call people to obedience, to a right relationship with God, to live and act according to God's ways.
 - They also would give words of prophecy, where God would tell them what was coming with the purpose of using this to try and get the attention of the people.
 - If there are multiple prophets and they are in service to the king, this creates a problem. What happens if two different prophets or groups of prophets say different things?
 - In Jeremiah's case, he had a difficult job because his messages were primarily of God's coming judgment and how the people had to stop living such wicked lives and more in God's direction. His messages gave him the nickname the weeping prophet.

- As you might expect, his words were often not received well and other prophets who said much nicer things were much more welcome with the king and the people than Jeremiah.
- What I want to focus on is the way it all started for Jeremiah, found in chapter 1.
Jeremiah 1:4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." 6 "Alas, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young." 7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. 9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."
- Powerful stuff! Jeremiah is being commissioned. He is set apart.
- Most scholars think he was probably in his teens when he received this commission.
- Let me make four observations about this invitation from God to Jeremiah and then let's see why this matters to us today.

I. Jeremiah was appointed to a specific purpose.

4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

- God makes a point of telling Jeremiah four things.
- "I formed you" – the word means to fashion, to make for a purpose, to determine. Jeremiah was no accident. His birthplace, what he looked like, everything about him, God planned. The Hebrew word (*tsur*) refers to the design of a house or the sculpting of a statue.
- "I knew you" – this is more than a colloquial friendly knowledge. Deep down. In every respect. Conveys the idea of close personal relationship and protection. He was invested in Jeremiah. He cared deeply and knew every in and out of his life and thinking.
- "I set you apart" – made holy, to appoint, to set aside. It means God had put his stamp on him. He had designated him.
- "I appointed you" – his was to be a prophet to the nations. This means he was going to speak on God's behalf to more than just Israel, but to the surrounding nations as well.
- Jeremiah's entire life was rooted in the purposes of God. God was working and Jeremiah was a part of that working.

II. Jeremiah felt inadequate.

6 "Alas, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."

- Jeremiah felt incompetent for this task.
- It's not as though he can't talk, but he does not have the innate skills or experience to go to the rich and powerful and to the nation as a whole to pass on God's words to them.
- He had no reference for it and was sure he could not accomplish it. It is too large for him.
- And in reality, his objection is absolutely correct. He could not do this on his own.
- God has already told Jeremiah that his life had a purpose, but he tells Jeremiah two more things.
- Two things that were supposed to carry him through the assignment that God was giving him that was going to last for 40 years.

III. God's authority determined Jeremiah's adequacy, not Jeremiah's competence.

7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

- Jeremiah, I understand your objections, but you can act in confidence.
- Not because you have some great ability, but because I am the one who is sending you.
- Your authority, your task, is based in me and my character, not your skills. You don't have to be afraid.
- Notice the two terms:
- "I send," and "I command."
- The emphasis here is on God's sending where he will, and God's commanding what he wants said. Jeremiah's youth does not matter if he is sent by God's commission and if he is speaking what God commanded.

ILLUSTRATION

When a younger child comes to their older teenage brother and says come to dinner. Dad said. It doesn't matter his size, he is simply communicating from the one who has authority.

- God reinforces this at the end.
- 9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*
- Jeremiah wasn't just a preacher. He was going to speak words that would influence entire kingdoms and nations.
 - Jeremiah, when you speak my words – when you announces judgment or when you promise blessing – it will come to pass. Judgments will break down, and promises will build up. Not because of young Jeremiah (that's the point!), but because the word of God is powerful.
 - Jeremiah, let me worry about the results. You focus on being faithful.

IV. Jeremiah's confidence was to be based on God's presence.

8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

- Jeremiah, you can be faithful because I will be with you. My presence is what matters. I will rescue you.
- This is fascinating in the light of Jeremiah's life. Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet because he continually communicated devastating news. As a result:
- He was plotted against multiple times.
- He served multiple bad kings who hated him.
- He was beaten by one of the head priests and put in the stocks to humiliate him.
- The other priests and prophets attempted to put him to death.
- Jeremiah was put in prison.
- When he is released he tries to warn King Zedekiah and all his hard work is burned up.
- He is beaten and put in prison again, for quite a long time, this time in a dungeon that threatened to take his life.
- He is released but in saying that the people should surrender to the Babylonians, he is thrown into a muddy cistern which he would have died if some people hadn't helped him out.
- He lives in Jerusalem through famine and the capture of the city by the Babylonians.
- He is forcibly taken to Egypt and leaves his home even though he had no desire to do so and he is in Egypt when Babylon sweeps in and destroys Jerusalem completely.

- From one perspective, it seems like God didn't live up to his end of what he promised. Jeremiah's life was one frequented by trouble.
- From another perspective, despite the difficult task and trying times, God always provided a rescue for Jeremiah when he needed it most.
- So God tells Jeremiah, "Let me own your life. I will be with you. I will watch over you."
- Now, this calling is specific to Jeremiah. God was calling him to be a prophet to Israel. We are not. But what do we learn from this that applies to us?
- **You have a unique purpose.**
- You know about fingerprints, but did you know our tongue, teeth, iris, retina, heartbeat, are utterly unique to you? That doesn't even take into account your unique personality, experiences, and life story.
- This is not just about feeling better about yourself. You have a unique purpose that God has assigned to you in this time and place. He knows you. He knew you and designed you before you were even conceived. He made you the way he wanted to because you are set up for a purpose bigger than yourself.
- The vast majority of us are not called to be prophets. Or leaders of large organizations. Or famous teachers.
- This means that even in the midst of being at home, riding out this pandemic, there are certain things that ONLY you can do. Relationships only you have. Passions that you feel uniquely. Opportunities that will be there for no one else.
- Who you are designed to be does not start when you are an adult. It does not end when you retire. It is lifelong. Secondly,
- **God will put you in places where you feel inadequate.**
- Not because he wants you to be uncomfortable, but because he wants you to trust him. He desires you to rely on him.
- When you are in those spots, remember, he designed you for those places. He made you to lean into those things.
- **When you follow Jesus, you are operating from God's authority.**
- This means you don't have to make anything happen. That's God's job and you are simply his representative. Faithfulness is the measuring stick more than results. That is big because we can determine our faithfulness. We can choose to follow. We can choose to be fearless because of who stands behind us. We can choose to obey.
- We can live the verse that says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)
- **God has promised you his presence.**
- I think sometimes we desire the benefits of Jesus more than his presence. We don't want trouble, or problems, or conflict, or issues. We want smooth sailing.
- But God has never promised this. What he has promised is to be with us. He will walk through this life alongside and whenever he has asked us to do something, he will deliver us. It may not look like you thought, but he is not absent.
- Our confidence is based on his presence, not on results.
- So, wherever you are this morning, whatever God has you doing, know that God is abundantly sufficient for you to accomplish your purpose.
- He has uniquely set you up, and even if you don't feel confident in it, you have his authority and his presence with you.
- **God has appointed you to make a difference.** No follower of Jesus exists merely to make an honest living, have a family, enjoy retirement, and die. Every one of us has a purpose bigger than us. And together as the church, OUR purpose is bigger than anyone of our own purposes alone.