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The Call of Kingdom Ministry, Part 1

Jeremiah 1:4-19, Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” 7 But
the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’;

for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

8 Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
declares the LORD.”

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me,

“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”

11 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see an almond branch.” 12 Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.”

13 The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.” 14 Then the LORD said to me, “Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. 15 For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the LORD, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah. 16 And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands. 17 But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. 18 And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. 19 They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.”

Our Call as Prophets

Christ as our Redeemer executes three offices: the offices of a prophet, priest, and king. These offices translate to a tri-fold calling in our lives by which we are to serve in God’s kingdom as mini prophets, priests, and kings.

As we focus upon our callings as “prophets” we see that as our redeemer, Christ exercises the office of a prophet “in revealing to us, by His word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.” Now as “mini-prophets” our lives will reflect this calling when we endeavor to use the word of God unto the very end for which it has been given: “... teaching... reproof... correction, [and] training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

That is the call of the “mini-prophet.” After giving the call to “make disciples” Christ told us that how “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. . .” Today, it is not our calling to proclaim new revelation from God. Rather, it is to proclaim the revelation God has already given to us unto the growth and maturation of the body of Christ (2 Timothy 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:5). That is the prophetic work today.

This same calling rests with the parents in a family.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

Yet that raises a variety of questions:

- What specifically is this calling?
- How does it translate to our lives as children of God in the twenty-first century?
- Are all called to serve as “mini-prophets”? Or is this just the prerogative of some?

Jeremiah 1 answers these questions and more. It details the call of Jeremiah from which we are able to deduce characteristics of the call that God has placed on our lives in Christ. There are six elements to the call that God placed on Jeremiah’s life as a prophet. The first is that the call of a prophet is a life-encompassing call.

Jeremiah 1:4, “Now the word of the Lord came to me saying...”

This verse appears to be rather insignificant both in the book of Jeremiah as well as in the section before us. Yet ironically, it contains a rather important word- דָּבָר (*dābar*) which is the word translated as “word.” This word is used¹ more than 2,500 times in the Bible! Obviously it is no insignificant word; yet it is a broad one. The King James version uses 110 different expressions to translate this one Hebrew word. Our understanding of this noun/verb typically is confined to “words spoken by an individual.” Accordingly, to read that “the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah...” is to assume that Jeremiah heard a voice, saw a vision, or had a dream by which he was able to convey a message from God (we call this revelation). Yet that falls way short of this word.

דָּבָר (*dābar*) involves far more than just the words spoken by an individual. The Hebrew word encompasses the will, intent, conviction of the person speaking, as well as their actions. J. A. Thompson put it this way:

The expression *the word of Yahweh...*, which opens the account of Jeremiah’s call, is significant. The noun *dābār* in Hebrew means “word,” “thing,” “action,” etc. For the

ancient Israelite, “word” and “event” were part of the same experience. What a person thinks or plans, what he says and what he does are all part of the same event. (Thompson, 1980, pp. 144-145)

Accordingly, in a context where Jeremiah is being called to the prophetic ministry, to say that “the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah” is to say that God’s will, intention, and so His plan of action was realized at this time in Jeremiah’s life! We could translate it, “The action of the Lord came to Jeremiah...” or “The providence of the Lord was worked out in Jeremiah...” or “The will of the Lord for Jeremiah came into being...”

Jeremiah 19:3, “And say, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.””

The word of the Lord here was much more than just the announcement that difficulty lay ahead; it involved this, but much more. The word of the calamity involved the calamity itself such that when the trial came, God’s people would have taken it as the word of the Lord. In fact, if there were any question, notice how Jeremiah told God what the people said in their mockery of the prophet:

Jeremiah 17:15, “Look, they keep saying to me, ‘Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now!’”

Do you see? God’s word and the promised calamity were one and the same! And thus, Jeremiah here just wasn’t informed by way of announcement that God had called him to be a prophet. The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah actively changed the course of his life; it impacted every part of Jeremiah; specifically how he spoke, where, when, and to whom he would go, and much, much more. And so we say that the Prophetic Call which Jeremiah received from the Lord was life-encompassing! In light of this, notice three characteristics of Jeremiah’s call.

First, Jeremiah’s Call was not age inhibited.

Jeremiah 1:7, “But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am a youth”...””

God spoke this in response to Jeremiah’s attempt to get out of the calling that God had placed on his life (v. 6). The excuse that Jeremiah gave was that he was just a lad- a “youth.”²

According to Jeremiah 1:2, Jeremiah was called in Josiah’s thirteenth year of ministry (specifically 627 BC). Now some, failing to appreciate the telescoping nature of many prophetic utterances (and so the fact that one prophesy could have dual subjects in mind~ Isaiah 7:14), want to place this call as the year of Jeremiah’s birth. They do this because the “foe” referenced in Jeremiah 4 fits much better with Babylon (active in Palestine around 608 BC) than the Scythians who attacked Judah in the early 620s. The only problem with this is that Jeremiah 25 says this:

Jeremiah 25:3, “From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.”

This text indicates that the ministry of Jeremiah as an active spokesman of God began in 627 BC “the 13th year of Josiah.” Accordingly, we understand that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the days of Josiah. Yet on account of the language, “I am a youth” (v. 6), we conclude that Jeremiah was a young man most likely 16 to 20 years old (born probably around 643 BC at the tail end of Manasseh’s reign).

Now whether or not you look at this from our perspective or from the era in which Jeremiah lived, 16 years old is rather young for an individual to be called NOT to the gospel ministry, BUT the prophetic ministry; a ministry in which he would be called to interact with kings and kingdoms (Jeremiah 1:10), princes, priests, royal officials (Jeremiah 1:18), and many, many more. Yet get this, if God has summoned you; if God calls age cannot be a deterrent (it most certainly wasn’t in Samuel’s life, 1 Samuel 3)! And for that matter, neither could we say gender, race, education, wealth, perceived skill, or anything else could detour God’s will to use a man/woman/child in His service!

For a moment place yourself in the shoes of this man, Jeremiah. If God called you this day to an unpleasant ministry in which you would be forced to serve in ways in which you were not comfortable (look at Jeremiah 1:10), what excuses might you raise to get out of the work?

- I, like Timothy, am too young.
- I, like Moses, can’t speak very well.
- I’m too much of a sinner.
- I’m not leadership material.
- I’ve just retired... or I’m getting too old to serve.

Yet, Jeremiah 1 teaches us that if God called you as He did Jeremiah, there is nothing we could say or ought to say, but, “Here am I! Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8) That is not to say that there isn’t a necessary place for training and preparation; there is (Paul spent three years in Arabia preparing for ministry, Galatians 1:17). It is to say that a call of God to ministry (1) involves the whole man- including his thoughts, education, training, disposition, and more (again, recall all that is behind the *dābār of the Lord!*), and it begins in a person’s life from the very start (notice Jeremiah 1:5)!

Secondly, notice that Jeremiah’s call knew no boundaries.

Jeremiah 1:7, “But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am a youth,” because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak.’”

Brothers and sisters, Moses tried to get out of the calling of God by citing inability (Exodus 4:10); yet God said, “Go!” If Jeremiah thought for one moment that his age could limit the will of God

either for him or the nation, he was sorely mistaken. And yet, not only would his age NOT be a factor, BUT, according to the text before us, neither would his geography, audience, or his message; none of this could set limitations on the work to which Jeremiah was called by God!

Did you get that? One of the key characteristics of the ministry to which Jeremiah was called was that it was not limited by the environment or company of the prophet. It was God's intention to use him, "as he went" (think of the Great Commission where "go" is not a command, but a participle phrase better translated, "as you go..." Matthew 28:19). This means:

- A prison could not thwart the "word" of the Lord.
- A cistern could not thwart God's "word."
- Stocks, public humiliation, exile couldn't hinder it!
- Neither could "death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing" could thwart the ministry, work, or will of God which the Lord purposed to effect in Jeremiah!

Thus if Jeremiah was confronted with any of these situations or peoples, he must view them NOT as inconveniences, BUT opportunities for the Lord! J. A. Thompson put it this way:

There was no choice of audience for Jeremiah. He was to go to anyone and everyone to whom Yahweh might send him. Nor did he have a choice of message. He was to tell his audience all that Yahweh commanded him (cf. Deut. 18:18). (Thompson, 1980, p. 148)

If you had the calling of Jeremiah, you should not be surprised by suffering; you should prepare for it. If there is a car wreck in your life, will it throw you off kilter? Or will you actively look to serve the Lord in any and every situation He places you? If you suffer a loss of your job, health, or child; will you find yourself cursing God or will you actively prepare to serve the Lord in these circumstances?

If you were Jeremiah and after this call you weren't actively preparing for what could lay ahead, you'd be a fool! Wouldn't you? Based on Jeremiah 1:4 & 7, you'd know that it was God's plan to use you in all situations and before all peoples; as such you'd be prepared; you'd assume the life of a "minute man"! Paul did. Recall his words:

1 Corinthians 9:20-23, "And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

Paul truly had become a "gospel man." Just like the professional athlete or Olympian, his whole life was geared toward one purpose... one calling... one goal. This was the call God gave to

Timothy.

1 Timothy 4:1-2a, "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season..."

Timothy must understand that as a servant of God he was always on the clock; it was the Lord's plan always to use Him! I love how Nicholas Selnekker put it:³

"Mark. O my soul, God's word to thee,
"And go at Christ's command,
"Where'er He draws thee hasten on,
"When He detains thee, stand."

Do you suppose Jeremiah prepared himself accordingly after receiving this call? I wonder; regardless, notice a third element that Jeremiah's call encompassed both the pleasant and unpleasant.

Jeremiah 1:10, "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

There are three sets of couplets given here which would have furthered Jeremiah's understanding of his call. To understand the couplets, picture in your mind a dilapidated farm; the fields are overgrown with small trees growing in them; the house is broken down and spoiled by many years of harsh weather. With this in mind, notice that Jeremiah was called by God to "pluck up and to break down" (Jeremiah 1:10).

This is farming language and references the idea of plowing a field and readying it for planting. In this case, the weeds, vegetation, and even the small trees that had begun to grow in a field during its fallow time are brutally and indiscriminately "plucked up and broken down."

Jeremiah 1:10, "destroy and to overthrow."

This is the language of carpentry. In order to build a house on a property that already has buildings, the carpenter must first "raze and so turn-over" all existing buildings. It may be necessary even to destroy their foundation (if it wasn't true or solid).

Jeremiah 1:10, "build and to plant."

Here God utilized language from the previous metaphors. Once the land is cleared of all buildings, the carpenter can "build." Once the soil is readied, the farmer can "plant." Such was the two-fold work of Jeremiah. It was destructive and constructive. It was designed to "destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). But then he was called to equip, encourage, and so train God's people in righteousness

(2 Timothy 3:16-17; cf. also Jeremiah 36:3)! God would indeed use this man to build His kingdom.

Now again you must see that this calling wasn't a one-time thing. Rather, it characterized Jeremiah's 45 year ministry such that the expressions as found in this passage ("plucking up and breaking down," "destroying and overthrowing," and "building and planting") are quoted numerous times throughout this prophecy.⁴ This was Jeremiah's life-long work!

Once again, if we were to place ourselves in Jeremiah's shoes, we'd note that God's call involved two different tasks: that which was pleasant and that which was unpleasant! Personally, we might be tempted to focus on the positive side of the call and so labor to do only those things which were pleasing in our eyes and most appreciated by those around us. Yet clearly Jeremiah had that option. He was called by God to serve the Lord according to the Divine will which seems to have been weighted on the negative side of things; the tearing down and plowing of the field in preparation for the building of a plantation!

The point you must see is that the choice did not lay with Jeremiah. As a prophet his satisfaction was NOT bearing good news, BUT being a faithful minister of Christ.

Once again we see this mindset in other servants of the Lord. Christ, after doing everything He did in the course of three years, had one more task before Him: to die as a sacrificial lamb! Accordingly, the last thing Jesus did, before He led the disciples to the Mount of Olives where He soon would be arrested, was to pray! Listen to His prayer:

John 17:4, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do."

The delight of Christ at the end of His ministry was NOT the miracles He did or the people He helped, BUT simply that He fulfilled the call that God had placed on His life!

We see it in Paul.
nagalsbach jeremiah

2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

Again, what was this man's pleasure? The fact that he had fulfilled his calling!

If you and I had received the call of Jeremiah, it would have been imperative to see that our glory would NOT be in the pleasant things God called us to do, BUT simply in the privilege of being used by God in the outworking of His Kingdom (be it a good or bad result)! Maurice contrasts a self-centered approach to ministry vs. a God-centered approach.⁵

If Jeremiah had fancied that he was a prophet because there was in him a certain aptitude for uttering divine discourses and foreseeing calamities [IOW, if he served according to his

own strength, wisdom, or wit], who can tell the weariness and loathing which he would have felt for his task when it led to no seeming result, except the dislike of all against or for whom it was exercised. (Johann Peter Lange, 1874, p. 21)

From all of this we see that Jeremiah's call was life-encompassing!

Now how do we derive application from this? Clearly we are talking about the formal office of a prophet; which none of us here hold! So can we apply this passage? Most certainly! While there will be elements of Jeremiah's call that do not apply to us (the principles derived from them most certainly will), nevertheless EVERYTHING we have seen as it pertains to Jeremiah's call pertains to us! Jeremiah's age did not preclude him from service in God's Kingdom; neither ought yours.

Was there a circumstance in Jeremiah's life where his ministry was inopportune? Was there a time where it would have been ill-advised for Jeremiah to bear the word of the Lord (either through his life or lip)? Neither ought there to be in yours!

Finally, was Jeremiah only to restrict his ministry to pleasant and pleasing things? No way, and neither should you!

Now I say this NOT because there is a blurring of the lines between the calling of a prophet and you. RATHER, I say because of what we have become in Christ. After summarizing the gospel the apostle Paul declared:

Romans 1:7, "...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints."

When a person is savingly called by God they are "set apart" and so "separated" unto God. This is what is behind the term, "saint." The word for "saint" is the same word used throughout Scripture for "holy." Something that is "holy" is different from anything else on this earth for it has been claimed by God and so now deigned to be used by God for His purpose! For example, it is used of:⁶

- The outer part of the Temple- called "the Holy Place," 1 Kings 8:10. There are many "places" on this earth, but there was a time when God claimed a place on this earth for Himself to be used for His purpose and will. This place was designated as, "the Holy place."
- The "Holy" Sabbath, Exodus 16:23. Once again there are many days in a year which are ours to do with as we please. BUT the seventh day of each week God has claimed for Himself for His purpose! It is His by virtue of His claim. Thus in Scripture the Lord's Day is sacred NOT because we do anything to it, BUT because God has claimed it for Himself!
- The "Holy" Priests, Leviticus 21:6-7. In the Old Testament there a variety of jobs and offices which an Israelite could hold in life, BUT those men holding the office with the designation of "priest" had been claimed by God for Himself for His purpose! Accordingly they were viewed by one and all (including God) as men who were at the disposal of the

Lord!

The word used in all of these places is the one translated as “saint” in the New Testament! So what therefore ought we to conclude about one bearing the designation of “saint” (literally “holy ones”)? They have been claimed by God for His purpose, and therefore ought to view themselves no longer as their own man/woman, but as ones who have been devoted at all times unto the service of Christ!

Now my question to you is this: Wasn’t this part of Jeremiah’s calling as a prophet? It was! We say this without stretching any Biblical truth, when God saved us by grace we too received a life-encompassing call which is not inhibited by age, race, social standing, education, or gender; not parceled out into holy and unholy time — we are ever and always on the clock such that we are God’s servants; in good times and in bad, when we feel like it and when we don’t, when we are engaged in sacrificial acts of service and even when we are engaged in sin! We are not restricted to only pleasant and pleasing things in our eyes, but also the undesirable and unfortunate things of life.

Now because all of this is true, how ought we to give ourselves as servants of the Living God, the Lord and the preparation to be used by God at all times? Remember the question I asked as we looked at each point? If you were called as was Jeremiah, what would you do by way of preparation? How would you spend your time?

We have been called... just like Jeremiah! May God give us the grace ever and always to be about the preparation and work of our calling!

End Notes

¹ In its noun and verb form.

² The Hebrew for youth (RSV) can also mean a ‘child’ or ‘infant’ (Exodus 2:6; 1 Samuel 4:21), and also a ‘young man’ (Genesis 14:24; 34:19), the sense of ‘youth’ being obviously intended here. (Harrison, R. K., *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, TOTC, p. 54).

³ In the hymn, “Abide with us, Lord Jesus Christ” (ver. 7). Selnecker, Nicolaus, D.D., son of Georg Selnecker (Selnecker, Schellenecker, who was protonotarius to the Nürnberg magistracy, but lived at Hersbruck near Nürnberg) was born at Hersbruck Dec. 5, 1532. In 1536 he was removed to Nürnberg, and became during his school time, when only twelve years old, organist at the chapel in the Kaiserburg there. He went to the university of Wittenberg in 1550 (where he became a favorite pupil of Melanchthon), graduated M.A. on July 31, 1554, and subsequently lectured as a privat-docent, sometimes to 200 students.

⁴ Jeremiah 12:14–17; 18:7–9; 24:6; 31:28, 40; 42:10; 45:4.

⁵ Quoted in Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Nagelsbach, C. W. E., & Asbury, S. R., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Jeremiah*, p. 21.

⁶ Other examples of that which is “holy” claimed by God: the tithe of the land (Leviticus 27:30), the inner part of the Temple- the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:33), scripture (Romans 1:2), the law and the commandment (Romans 7:12), the kiss with which Christians should greet one another (Romans 16:16), etc...

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About the Preacher

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