



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 12 Issue 22

June 9, 2013

The Call of Kingdom Ministry, Part 5

Jeremiah 1:4-19, Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "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." Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." 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. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." 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. 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." And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see an almond

branch.” Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.” 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.” Then the LORD said to me, “Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. 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. 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. 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. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.”

Abraham’s Ministry

This past week I was reflecting upon Abraham and the incredible journey God took him on. At age 75, when he had lived most of his life:

- Established a livelihood, a home, a foundation with family, friends, and the like.
- A routine which no doubt brought comfort and security to him.
- A support network by which he could look toward the future and smile.

Nevertheless, one day he simply picked up everything and moved to a barbaric/backwards land lacking order, law, and a unified government. Why would he do that? The land in which he lived was not in a drought and, based on the group that went with him, it wasn’t because he was impoverished. So why did he leave?

Abram left the comfort and convenience of his modern society because God NOT ONLY saved him, BUT called him to follow the Lord as He led him to Palestine (Genesis 12:1; Acts 7:2). So Abram went in faith; but he also went with some amazing promises.

- God would be his God and he would be God’s people.
- The Lord would protect him and fight for him.
- Abraham would be a blessing to many nations.
- And it wasn’t just Abraham, but God would raise up a people from him that would number the stars in the heavens!

In fact it was these promises which led many, many more in Redemptive History to live as aliens and strangers on the earth (Hebrews 11:13-16)! And so while Christianity does involve self-sacrifice and the “taking up of one’s cross,” it nevertheless brings with it some glorious benefits!

When God called Jeremiah to the ministry of a prophet, Jeremiah went forth, yet not before receiving three consolations which rest with you and me as Abraham's offspring! Now we need to keep these promises/consolations ever before us because the ministry to which we have been called, which is truly difficult. It will put you at odds with this passing world such that you will be a stranger and an outcast!

The first two of these consolations are these:

- The Assurance of God's Covenant Presence (v. 8) by which "the valley of weeping becomes a spring!"
- The Assurance of God's Unthwartable Will (vv. 11-12) by which we are assured that in and through all things God is bringing about His perfect will and our good!

The Assurance of God's and Our Ultimate Vindication

The third consolation is the assurance of God's and our ultimate vindication.

Jeremiah 1:18-19, "Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city, and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. And they will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord."

Recall, this is the "Iron Man" verse by which God informed the prophet of what he had become on account of grace! Now because of the presence of God in Jeremiah's life, what is it that Jeremiah could expect as a prophet of the Lord, that despite the opposition mounted against him (v. 18), in the end Jeremiah would NOT "be overcome," BUT instead "overcome" (v. 19)! God would "deliver" the prophet with the implication that in the end, Jeremiah/God/His purpose and will would triumph over this world! Jeremiah had the promise of ultimate vindication!

And yet notice that this promise and theme rests with all God's people; not just Jeremiah! Here is are some of the promises that God gave to His people during Jeremiah's ministry; promises which encompass you and me!

Jeremiah 31:20, "Is Ephraim [a name for the people of God] My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly *still* remember him; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him," declares the Lord."

Because of her sin, Judah needed to be disciplined. This is what Jeremiah tended in his forty year ministry! However we must see at no time did God lose His love for His people! Accordingly, Jeremiah was given this message to proclaim to God's children, "*The discipline you have received is given in mercy!*" ...

Jeremiah 30:15, 17a, “‘Why do you cry out over your injury? Your pain is incurable. Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous, I have done these things to you... [Yet] I will restore you to health and I will heal you of your wounds,’ declares the Lord...”

When the child of God sins they are disciplined. Sometimes this discipline results in scars. Yet the scars are medicinal as they bring the Christian to “undistracted devotion to the Lord” and so their “restoration”! That was the promise here! Through the exile, God would heal His people! Yet what specifically does God have in mind when He references “restoration”?

Jeremiah 30:3, “‘For, behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The Lord says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.’”

I hope you see that the promise encompassed NOT ONLY blessing in this life (a physical return to Palestine after 70 years), BUT the life to come! According to Hebrews 11:15-16, the ultimate fulfillment of any “land-promise” in Scripture is the New Heavens and Earth! This means the promise given in this verse encompasses us!

Jeremiah 30:8-9, “‘And it shall come about on that day,’ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘that I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers shall no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.’”

This obviously is talking about today and eternity where “David their King” clearly references Jesus Christ, to rule over us! In other words, God’s plan for His people went way beyond the geo-political kingdom that existed in Jeremiah’s day to involve His people co-reigning with Him in a New Heavens and a New Earth where Christ is King! At this time, notice what will be said of us:

Jeremiah 31:14, “‘And I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,’ declares the Lord.”

I hope you see that the consolation of ultimate vindication wasn’t limited to Jeremiah! The promise clearly rests upon all God’s people, including us! After mentioning tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword, Paul said,

Romans 8:37-39, “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” See, none of these horrible setbacks can thwart God’s work and will in the lives of God’s people. In the end, we are going to triumph! Now as wonderful as is this truth, it is just the beginning! For notice, Paul continued, “For I am convinced that neither 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, shall be able to separate us from the

love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This was the promise God gave Jeremiah as he entered the prophetic ministry. Every tear given up on account of the work of the Lord would be paid back a thousand-fold, for “God’s plans [for all His ministers] are for their welfare and not their calamity to give them a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11)! So yes, God has claimed you to be His servant which means you are not your own, but are ever and always at the disposal of God. This means He most likely is going to use you in ways you don’t like AND He is going to require of you that which you won’t want to give! But don’t let this frighten you. God sends you into His kingdom with some glorious consolations:

- The Assurance of God’s Covenant Presence, v. 8.
- The Assurance of God’s Unthwartable Will, vv. 11-12.
- The Assurance of God’s and Our Ultimate Vindication, vv. 18-19.

These are the consolations God gives to all who have been called by His name to minister in His kingdom. Now in the life of Jeremiah, notice that it all began with a commissioning.

The Commissioning

Jeremiah 1:9-10, “Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. 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.’”

With this, God formally commissioned Jeremiah unto the prophetic ministry in which he received two things: an engifting and a calling! As to the engifting, God touched the prophet’s mouth such that now the word of the Lord weighed heavy upon him. As such, he not only was given the gift of speaking forth the word of God, BUT this engifting gave him an impulse which he could not deny, even when he was angry over the results of preaching the word of God.

Jeremiah 20:8-9, “I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding *it* in, and I cannot endure *it*.”

As to his calling, Jeremiah also received a specific charge to serve as a prophet/spokesman of God both to Judah and all the nations to whom the Lord would send him. Now it is important to note that while what we have seen to this point about Jeremiah’s call to the ministry is true of us, nevertheless what we read here does NOT directly apply to us. The prophetic office no longer exists today. What we read here therefore was germane only to Jeremiah and any and all in Bible times who received the prophetic call (cf. also Deuteronomy 18:18; Is. 6:7; Ezekiel 2:9-3:3). And yet, that doesn’t mean that we cannot draw application from this passage, for if

you are saved, you both have been engifted for service in Christ's Kingdom and likewise called!

Engifting

When we think of "engifting" for service in the context of the believer today we think of four passages: Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and Romans 12 each of these give attention to the spiritual gifts that God gives in His church. It is not my intent to address these passages or the gifts. However I want to point out that if you are saved, you have been given a spiritual gift which God intends you to use.

1 Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a *special* gift [and we have!], employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Now sadly today we allow a sense of inability, life stage, our age, and many other excuses to detour us from using the gift that God has given us for service. Now if a preacher did this, we'd rightly say that he was holding God in contempt! If that is true, then what must we say about the gifts that God has given us? Not to use them likewise would be to hold God in contempt! Suffice it to say that the statement in Jeremiah 1:17 on the part of God that if Jeremiah were to be "dismayed" before those to whom God called him (that is, shrink back and not use the gifts God gave him), the Lord would "dismay him makes it a serious thing not to use the gifts God has given us!

Calling

If we have been saved by Christ, we've also received a "calling" for service.

Galatians 6:1a, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one..."

From this and many passages we conclude that in the Kingdom of God today God's people receive a call to service any time they see a need! If in the course of fellowship, you discover a brother or sister struggling in sin, guess who just received a call to service? If you see someone who looks down and in need of encouragement, guess who just received a call? The only condition in this case is that you yourself are not living in unrepentant sin ("...you who are spiritual...")! Recall Christianity is at its best:

James 1:27, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Once again, you see a needy, hurting person the obligation to minister to that person rests upon you! That is the ideal in Christianity! Yes there are still specific callings which God gives to men. Yet the norm in the New Testament church is that the ministers of Christ's church are,

“All the people!” To a group of men who did everything they could to avert the general calling we’re talking about today, Christ told the parable of the Good Samaritan concluding with these words,

Luke 10:36-37, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ *hands*?’ And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy toward him.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same.’”

Would there be any here who would confine the calling of the Good Samaritan to a few, highly trained and elected men? NO! This is the essence of ministry in God’s Kingdom: surveying the horizon regarding the opportunities God gives you for ministry, and then responding to them with the knowledge that to see a need is to receive a calling from God to service!

Jeremiah was specially gifted and called to the prophetic ministry. While we do not expect such a calling today (again the prophetic office no longer exists), that doesn’t absolve us of responsibility! Each of us has been given a spiritual gift and the calling to use that gift whenever the need arises! Now it might be tempting to think that if we respond positively to God’s engifting and callings that life will be easy and wonderful; yet this isn’t the case. The flesh hates the Lord and so it hates you! And that brings us to another point; even in the context of ministering to the body of Christ, your service often involves unpleasant things.

Unpleasant Things

Jeremiah 1:13-14, “And the word of the Lord came to me a second time¹ saying, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see a boiling pot², facing away from the north.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land.’”

This constitutes the second vision which Jeremiah received shortly after being called as a prophet. In fact, it set the tone for the rest of Jeremiah’s service and ministry.

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.”

What was it that Jeremiah was to do? In essence it was to rebuild a once glorious plantation whose buildings and fields were in shambles (recall the language used here)! As such, the majority of Jeremiah’s ministry was that of destruction.

In light of this we are not surprised to read that one of the first visions that Jeremiah had was that of a “large pot” or cauldron (think of a kettle drum in which a small child could hide) on an “open fire” boiling away. And yet because it was “tipped just a little bit toward the south,” its contents were splattering out in such a way that if you stood too close to it on the south side, you would get burned! The point of this vision was that something dreadful, “from the north,” was coming toward Judah and any and all standing in its path would get burned.

Jeremiah 1:15-16, “For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,’ declares the Lord; ‘and they will come, and they will set each one his throne // at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices³ to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.”

The language speaks of a massive invasion! The “setting of thrones” is a picture of conquest! Their location, “at the entrance of the gates” where commerce took place, speaks of conquest and subsequent rule. And the “judgments” of v. 16 are NOT directed toward the nations, BUT Judah, God’s people!

This in a nutshell was the message God gave Jeremiah to give to His people: Judgment! And as we have seen, Jeremiah’s calling didn’t remove Jeremiah from the miseries that were coming upon the nation on account of this judgment!

- Jeremiah would indeed lose loved ones when Judah was attacked.
- He would starve when the nation starved.
- He’d go without when there were no supplies.
- In fact if anything, he would suffer more than his countrymen because in their pain they would lash out at Jeremiah for bringing the message!

From this we see that ministry in Christ’s Kingdom always comes at a high cost to self. If the flesh hates Christ and you are called to minister to people who still possess a “flesh,” then what ought you to expect when it comes to their treatment of you?

From the “balcony”⁴ it is easy:

- To entertain the notion that somehow Jeremiah was delivered from the pain and destruction he was called to announce; *maybe some ravens secretly fed him while the nation starved!*
- To debate whether Jeremiah truly was affected when he was on the receiving end of abuse.

Yet Christian, travelers upon the path of life know better. They know that a cardinal rule of all ministry is that it will cost you greatly if you would be a faithful servant of Christ (that is what is behind the idea of “taking up your cross” [Luke 9:23-24])! In this context, Paul no longer can be seen as the ideal, but what is typical of all service in Christ’s Kingdom:

2 Corinthians 11:26-29, “*I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been*

in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure upon me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

Truly, you cannot give yourself to the ministries and callings which God brings into your path without it requiring something of you! Ministry is never cheap; it always comes at a high price to self!

So why do we do it?

I hope first and foremost that we do it because we love Christ! Yet there are other reasons which propel us into the service of Christ; three of which we have seen in Jeremiah.

- The Assurance of God's Covenant Presence (v. 8) by which "the valley of weeping becomes a spring!"
- The Assurance of God's Unthwartable Will (vv. 11-12) by which we are assured that in and through all things God is bringing about His perfect will and our good!
- The Assurance of God's and Our Ultimate Vindication (vv. 18-19) by which we live in light of the Kingdom that is coming to this world.

Because of these glorious promises, we may willingly engage the ministry of God's Kingdom!

We see it in Christ Himself in John 13. In John 13 Christ and the disciples are in the upper room prior to the start of the formal Passover meal. Yet before the meal could begin, all present had to undergo the ceremonial foot washing whose job rested with the lowliest person present... usually a servant. Now, if there were no servants present, then the job devolved upon a daughter. If there were no daughters, then it rested with the wife. If there were no women in the room, then it rested with the lowest male present. In the upper room, we know that there were no servants or women present, which meant that the "lowliest" disciple would have been charged with the duty. Yet at this point there was much debate...

Luke 22:24, "And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest."

See, no one wanted to wash another's feet; they were all too proud! It is here that John picks up the story in John 13.

John 13:1-5, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that (1) His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him, *Jesus*, knowing that (2) the Father had given all things into His hands, and that (3) He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a

towel, He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."

We consider a passage like this and are amazed, there are so many things going on here! You see the unconditional grace of Christ who loved His disciples even when they were unlovely! You see the condescending grace of Christ as He is stripped of his honor and takes the form of a servant! You see the penetrating grace of Christ as each disciple in turn has their feet washed. You see the selfless grace of Christ- this was "his hour" which the disciples made their own on account of their pride and selfishness!

Yet Christ did not balk or pull back! He didn't say, *"Oh forget it! You think I'm going to die for you when you are being so selfish! Consider My needs for once in your life!"*

How is it that Christ didn't pull back? Notice He was driven by three consolations:

- The Assurance of God's Unthwartable Will (v. 1)- "...knowing that His hour had come..."
- The Assurance of God's Covenant Presence (v. 3)- "...knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands..."
- The Assurance of God's and Our Ultimate Vindication (v. 3b)- "...knowing that... He had come forth from God, and was going back to God..."

Christian, we've been called to have the "mind" of Christ (Philippians 2:5)- a mind which was set on and so moved by the things above! It therefore behooves us to keep these consolations ever and always before us as we serve!

End Notes

¹ The language here indicates that the visions given to Jeremiah were in close proximity to each other!

² Literally, "a pot blown upon." With large pots, the fire was stoked when the wind blew upon the open flame beneath the pot.

³ "The verb qtr (קטר - burn incense) is used elsewhere of the burning of fat in sacrificial offerings (1 Samuel 2:16; Psalm 66:15), the offering of meal (Amos 4:5), or the burning of incense. The tensions of syncretism between Baal worship and Israelite monotheism have now reached a climax." (Harrison, R. K., *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, TOTC, p. 56)

⁴ I'm alluding to the metaphor used by J. I. Packer at the opening of "Knowing God"- balconeers vs. travellers.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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