

## **PROPHET JEREMIAH**

Our first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah, so I thought it will be helpful to know more about Prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a Levitical priest. He was born in a small village of Anathoth, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah was a man called to be a prophet to deliver God's message to Judah. In the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Josiah of Judah (ca. 627 B.C), God called Jeremiah while he was still a youth.

Jeremiah served as one of God's prophets through the rule of five kings of Judah (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah).

His prophetic ministry extended over a period of more than 40 years.

God called Jeremiah to his prophetic ministry about one year after king Josiah began leading the nation in a great reform from the widespread idolatry promoted by his father, Amon. God's people had broken their covenant with God (Jer 11:10). They had forsaken God by worshipping the false gods and showing ingratitude toward God's loving kindness.

It was against this background that Jeremiah was appointed to reveal the sins of the people, the grave consequences of ignoring them and that the people needed to return to God.

We are skilful at the art of making excuses, aren't we? "I don't know how." "I didn't understand." "I couldn't find the right tools." "I have a Doctor's appointment." "I have a relative coming to visit"

In the Christian world, we can find all sorts of excuses not to obey God's voice: "It's not my gift." "I've already served, let someone else do it." "I'm too busy or too tired or too old or too young."

It has been said, "Excuses are tools of the incompetent, and those who specialize in them seldom go far." Ben Franklin wrote, "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else." Gabriel Meurier stated, "He who excuses himself, accuses himself."

Jeremiah had every excuse ready when God called him to be a prophet. His excuses are often our excuses for not heeding God's voice when he calls. Countering each excuse was a promise from God.

### **I. The Excuse: The Task is Demanding**

Jeremiah was called to be "a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5), not a priest like his father and his grandfather. A prophet was a chosen and authorized spokesman for God who declared God's Word to the people. We often think of prophets as people who can tell the future. But a prophet spoke messages to the present that had future ramifications. They

were forthtellers more than they were foretellers, exposing the people's sins and calling them back to their covenant responsibilities before God.

Being a prophet was more demanding than serving as a priest. The priests' duties were predictable. Everything was written down in the law. The prophet never knew from one day to the next what the Lord would call him to say or to do. The priest worked primarily to preserve the past. The prophet laboured to change the present so the nation would have a future. Priests dealt with externals - rituals, sacrifices, offerings, services - whereas the prophet tried to reach and change hearts. Priests ministered primarily to individuals with various needs. Prophets, on the other hand, addressed whole nations, and usually the people they addressed didn't want to hear the message. Priests belonged to a special tribe and therefore had authority and respect, but a prophet could come from any tribe and had to prove his divine call. Priests were supported from the sacrifices and offerings of the people, but prophets had no guaranteed income.

Jesus, too, was called to be a prophet. He travelled from place to place challenging the people to change so that their future in heaven would be guaranteed. Jesus spoke to the hearts of people. Most did not accept his message of repentance, for they did not want to change.

### **The Promise**

God assured Jeremiah: "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born" (Jer. 1:5). God knew Jeremiah, chose Jeremiah, and appointed Jeremiah. He was known by name, hand-picked by God, and commissioned to serve. Those acts give one a great sense of purpose. The promise of God's purpose allows us to let go of our own plans and to receive God's plan without fear. Like Jeremiah and Jesus, we need to accept that our future is not our own. We are God's. He has a distinct plan and purpose for our lives.

## **II. The Excuse: My Talent is Inadequate**

Jeremiah comes up with another excuse to God: "But I protested, 'Oh no, Lord, GOD! Look, I don't know how to speak since I am only a youth'" (Jer. 1:6). Jeremiah felt inadequate as a public speaker.

God has a way to overcome weakness and our insufficiencies, doesn't he? God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. His glory is manifested through our flaws.

### **The Promise**

"Then the LORD reached out His hand, touched Jeremiah's mouth, and told him: I have now filled your mouth with My words" (Jer. 1:9). The touch was not so much to purify as it was to inspire and empower. It was symbolic of the gift of prophecy bestowed on Jeremiah.

Our talent may appear inadequate, but God always equips those he calls.

Jesus experienced this touch in a visible, yet profound way. Following his baptism, immediately coming out of the water, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended

on him like a dove. And God spoke, "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him" (Matt. 3:17).

God blesses not the silver-tongued orator, but the one whose tongue has been touched with coals from the altar. God uses not the most gifted and talented person, but the one touched by the hand of God. God uses the most unlikely persons to shake a church or a community or a nation. Never underestimate the power of the touch; especially when God does the touching.

### **III. The Excuse: The Time is Not Right**

Jeremiah comes up with third excuse: Jeremiah said to God, "I am only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). He felt inferior, inexperienced, and intimidated by the size of the task to which God was summoning him.

#### **The Promise**

God promised Jeremiah: "Then the LORD said to me: Do not say, 'I am only a youth,' for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you. Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you. This is the LORD's declaration" (Jer. 1:7-8).

God's call may come at an inopportune time, but he never sends forth his servant alone. God walks with us.

What a difference it makes knowing that when we are being sent, someone is going with us. We know we do not have to walk the lonesome road alone, that we have a travelling companion.

### **IV. The Excuse: The Teaching is Dangerous**

The Lord did not give Jeremiah a joyful message of deliverance to announce, but a tragic message of judgment. Consequently, Jeremiah would be misunderstood, persecuted, arrested, and imprisoned. More than once his life was threatened. The people did not want to hear the truth. Jeremiah told them plainly they were defying the Lord, disobeying the law, and destined for judgment.

Jesus' teaching contained mercy and judgment, grace and punishment. Jesus' teachings were dangerous, too. In fact, it was his teaching that cost him his life.

#### **The Promise**

God's promise to Jeremiah: "Today, I am the One who has made you a fortified city - against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the population. They will fight against you but never prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you" (Jer. 1:18-19).

God reassured Jeremiah: Attack you they will; overcome you they can't.

The person who stands with God will prevail. Alone we are helpless. With God we prevail.

## **V. The Excuse: Do I Have to Go Now?**

God was expecting immediate action from Jeremiah. God said, "Now, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything that I command you" (Jer. 1:17). God called Jeremiah to act. He was called to deliver God's message to the people. He would not be welcomed, nor would he be accepted. He would anger his hearers.

### **The Promise**

God's promise to Jeremiah: "Do not be intimidated by them" (Jer. 1:17). Obedience is the only appropriate response when God calls.

Jesus obeyed. Whatever you think of Jesus, remember this, his heart was a willing and obedient heart. He always did the will of his Father. There was no hesitation, no questioning, no circumventing. Only obedience

Has God called you? Then he will fulfil his purpose in you, he will equip you, he will enable you, he will protect you, he will accompany you. Are you obeying his commands? Then he is with you to protect you. Are you sharing the word? Then he will accomplish his purposes no matter how the people respond.

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