

God's Appointed Prophet

3 January, 2010

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower

Scripture Reference – Jeremiah chapter 1

Unit Theme: Major Prophets

Central Truth: God empowers those who submit to His will.

Focus: Consider God's appointment of Jeremiah and embrace God's plan for our lives.

Key Verse: Jeremiah 1:5

Introduction:

¹*"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."*

Lord John Acton wrote that in a letter to his friend Mandell Creighton on April 5, 1887. When he ended the letter, the British historian added this postscript: "History provides neither compensation for suffering nor penalties for wrong." As you study the prophecy of Jeremiah, you'll learn that Lord Acton was right in his first statement; for you will meet in this book some of history's most powerful and corrupt rulers. But Lord Acton was terribly wrong in his postscript. God is still on the throne and history is His story. The German writer Friedrich von Logau said it better:

Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;

Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.

God judges the nations and eventually pays them the wages earned from their sin. No nation can despise God's law and defy His rule without suffering for it. The prophecy of Jeremiah teaches that very clearly. In his familiar poem "The Present Crisis," the American poet James Russell Lowell penned words that summarize Jeremiah's life and ministry:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,

In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side.

Though at first he hesitated when God called him, Jeremiah surrendered to the Lord and became one of history's most decisive spiritual leaders. Tragically, however, the people who most needed his leadership rejected him and turned their backs on the Word of God. As never before, our homes, churches, cities, and nations need decisive leaders who will obey the Word of God. "If you ever injected truth into politics," quipped Will Rogers, "you have no politics." The politician asks, "Is it popular?" The diplomat asks, "Is it safe?" But the true leader asks, "Is it God's will? Is it right?" To quote James Russell Lowell's "The Present Crisis" again:

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—

Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,

Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

That's what the Lord told Jeremiah: "I am watching over My word to perform it" (Jer. 1:12, NASB).

The burden of Jeremiah was undoubtedly incomprehensible. God called and commissioned him to speak out against the sin of his nation, a nation that once knew God, but now rejected Him. While experiencing rejection from his own people, Jeremiah stood alone as a prophet of truth, warning of God's judgment. For his obedience to the Lord's call, he would suffer greatly. God does not call everyone to security and physical prosperity; on the contrary, some are called to walk through the unimaginable for the purpose of saving the few. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said the road that leads to hell is wide and many are the travels thereon, but the road that leads to heaven is narrow and how few there are that go that way. We may never know how many heard

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the words of Jeremiah and turned back to God, but we can be confident that it was the minority. Therein lies the great mystery of God, that He would become a man and die for all, knowing that only a few would accept His eternal offer. Certainly this reveals the mercy and love of God that He would allow us an opportunity to repent and except His salvation, lest we face His judgment for eternity. Comparatively, our generation is no different than Jeremiah's, there are many who have rejected God. As a result, God has called a few to speak His word to the many, those who answer His call, as Jeremiah, have a great task ahead of them. Most will reject the word of the Lord, but this does not change the fact that it is still His desire that all repent and advert His judgment.

I. Divine Appointment – Jeremiah 1:4-10

Undoubtedly, the word of the Lord comes in several different ways. The question we must ask ourselves is, are we listening for His voice, are we watching for His hand to move in our lives? Just as it is true that the Lord is found by those who seek Him, so it is true that He is heard by those who are listening for Him. To hear God speak, Jeremiah must have been tuned into His channel, the same holds true for us, we too will hear God speak if we'll just tune in. He speaks to us in many different ways, albeit there are few who have heard His audible voice. God often chooses to speak in a still small voice; it is just as legitimate as His audible voice. However it is that Gods speaks to us we need to not take it for granted, nor should we assume that it is because we are worthy. It's simply by the grace of God that any hear His voice. We must be careful to not miss His purpose. Whether audibly, through His word, His servants, or His still small voice God does not speak to us just so we can "feel good." There is purpose behind His communication, God wants to save, heal, and deliver; so inevitably this is the purpose of Him speaking. For some it is a personal message, but for others it is a message of commissioning to carry to others. The irony in all this is when we are obedient and carry His word to others; they too are hearing God speak. Whether they receive it or not does not take away from the fact that it is God speaking to them. In this way starting at the great commissioning and continuing on, the word of God is going forth today as at no other time before. God is speaking – will you hear what He has to say?

➤ **Think about it:**

How does God speak to you and what does He say?

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"It is not you that shapes God but God that shapes you. If you are the work of God, await the hand of the artist who does all things in due season." – **Irenaeus**

II. Divine Word – Jeremiah 1:11-16

¹*When Jeremiah began his ministry, Assyria, not Babylon, was the dominant power in the Near East, and no doubt many of the political experts thought Jeremiah foolish to worry about Babylon in the north. But the people of Judah lived to see Assyria defeated and Egypt crippled as Babylon rose to power and Jeremiah's words came true. Indeed, the thrones of the conquering Babylonian leaders were set in the gate of Jerusalem (39:1-3), and the holy city was eventually destroyed. Amos 3:7 reveals that the Lord does not do anything unless He first reveals it to His prophets. Again and again we see the truth of this in God's word as His judgment is poured out against the idolatry of His people. We cannot assume that we are the exception just because we live under the New Covenant. Romans 2:5 says, that God's wrath is being stored up against the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment. On Calvary, Christ fulfilled the wrath of God, since then it is being stored up for the day(s) of judgment. This judgment will be so severe that Jesus said that unless those days be shortened none would survive, but for the elect's sake, they will be shortened (Matthew 24:22). Therefore, we must choose today to serve God, this is not an easy commitment. Those who do choose to serve God will be under constant attack of the enemy who is trying in these last days to destroy the faith of the elect. The devil will stop at nothing to keep this generation from hearing the word of the Lord. The task before us is great; far more are rejecting God's word than are receiving it. However, God will triumph in the end and righteousness will reign for eternity.*

➤ **Think about it:**

How has the enemy attacked your faith?

"For a people to boast in the glory of the past, and to deny the secret that made the past, is to perish." – **G. Campbell Morgan**

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III. Divine Empowerment – Jeremiah 1:17-19

If God does not empower us, our courage will amount to little. With His empowerment however, our courage is transformed into action. Jeremiah could have ignored the voice of the Lord and went the way of the majority, but instead he chose the way less traveled. As a result, the Lord empowered him to stand when by all logical observations he should have fallen. ¹*His choice, caused him to become one of the most unpopular prophets in Jewish history. Measured by human standards, his ministry was a failure, but measured by the will of God, he was a great success. It isn't easy to stand alone, to resist the crowd, and to be out of step with the philosophies and values of the times. Jeremiah, however, lived that kind of a life for over forty years. In the final chapter of his book "Walden", Henry David Thoreau writes: "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."* Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, 26, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.... For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? We need divine empowerment now more than ever, in his bid to destroy the work of God the devil knows no limits and follows no rules, he will stop at nothing to steal the hope of redemption from the saved and the lost – none are exempt.*

➤ **Think about it:**

Have you ever been confronted with a task that you felt inadequate to handle?

"What is courage? It is the ability to be strong in trust, in conviction, in obedience. To be courageous is to step out in faith – to trust and obey, no matter what." – Kay Arthur

Conclusion:

¹*When you study the Old Testament prophets, you discover that three strands of truth wove their messages together: (1) past sin: the nation has disobeyed God's Law; (2) present responsibility: the people must repent or God will send judgment; and (3) future hope: the Lord will come one day and establish His glorious kingdom. The Lord didn't give Jeremiah a joyful message of deliverance to announce but rather a tragic message of judgment. So dangerous was this*

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message that people hearing it called Jeremiah a traitor. He would be misunderstood, persecuted, arrested, and imprisoned; and more than once, his life was in danger. The nation didn't want to hear the truth, but Jeremiah told them plainly that they were defying the Lord, disobeying the Law, and destined for judgment. Though we do not always understand the ways of God, we can rest assured that He is God and faith sometimes demands that we drive on, even when we can't see the road. God will lead and guide us and keep us on the straight and narrow. His purpose and will for our lives is far beyond our understanding and though we may not clearly see all the details now, we can have a quiet confidence that one day we will fully know, just as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

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Except where I have paraphrased all scripture is taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

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Next Week's Lesson – God's Response to Unfaithfulness

- I. Israel's Unfaithfulness – Jeremiah 3:1-10**
- II. God's Admonition – Jeremiah 3:12-20**
- III. Repentance and Promised Restoration – Jeremiah 3:21-25**
 - Mon – Unfaithfulness Confronted – 2 Samuel 12:1-12**
 - Tue – Prayer of Repentance – Psalm 51:1-12**
 - Wed – Faithfulness Rewarded – Jeremiah 35:12-19**
 - Thur – Regret for Failure – Mark 14:66-72**
 - Fri – Message of Repentance – Acts 2:36-40**
 - Sat – Pattern for Repentance – 1 John 1:5-10**