

The God Called Life  
3-Year Bible Reading Plan  
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**Bible Text:** Jeremiah 1-52  
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Tonight as we open up to the book of Jeremiah, let me give you a warning: we're going to start in chapter 5 and we're going to end in chapter 20, I mean chapter 1 to chapter 20. We're not going to cover each and every verse and each and every section, but I wanted to give you kind of an overview tonight of who we know as the person of Jeremiah. He has 52 chapters in the Bible. He's the only prophet that not only prophesied before the Babylonian captivity but during the Babylonian captivity, and tonight I've entitled it "A God Called Life," and there's several parallels that we can do this evening. One of the things that you will see tonight is a lot of the things that Jeremiah was called to do and the way that the world responded to him is very similar to how the world responded to Jesus Christ. We're going to see the parallel that a lot of the things that Jeremiah was called to do and how the world responded to him is what we see in the church of Jesus Christ, maybe what you see as an individual believer.

But before we do so, I want to give us a very stark warning. When we go into the Old Testament, particularly when we're dealing with the prophets, one of our natural inclinations and I think you might call it errors, is that somehow we put the church into Israel of the Old Testament. And let me remind us tonight that the church is not Israel and Israel is not the church, and what I mean by that is the prophecies that you see of the Old Testament involving the entity known as Israel are given to Israel, and those that are left unfulfilled to this date will one day be fulfilled at sometime in the future, just read the last book of the Bible and half of it is written to whom we know as the 12 tribes of Israel. And so I think sometimes we fall into this trap of placing ourselves doctrinally in their position.

Now we can learn a type of or a picture of. In fact, you go back to the book of Genesis and Joseph is a type of Christ. I mean, you think about here's this one who is beloved among his brothers, he's betrayed by his brothers, he's sold by his brothers, and yet he still redeems his brothers. But we would never go back into Joseph and determine who Jesus was by who Joseph was, and so don't over-read into this, just as we look back at who Jeremiah was, as we look at who Israel was in this picture, allow it to give us a picture, allow it to give us an understanding of who the church is, who we are in Jesus Christ. Let's not over-read it but let's allow it to read into what we're walking through today.

So tonight I just want to talk about the God called life, what does it look like to be called by God. Now if you did your Bible reading today, you will know that the Lord had some very pointed words for the pastors, did he not? He had some pointed words for the priests and for the prophets, but when we talk about the God called life, yes, there's an aspect to those who God has called to "vocational ministry," but there's also the aspect that he's called each and every one of us to get up every day and live our lives for the Lord. And so these are just some of the things that we see in Jeremiah's life that I think we see in our own as well.

The first thing is this, chapter 1, verse 5, a very famous passage of Scripture that Jeremiah was called without consent. In other words, the calling that God placed on his life, he did not seek, shall we say, his willingness to participate. Now this is different than Isaiah. Remember in Isaiah 6 when he sees the Lord high and lifted up, he sees the train of his robe filling the temple, he says, "Woe am I, I'm a man of unclean lips!" And the seraphim put the coal from the altar of the Lord on his lips. Remember the Lord says, "Who will go for us and who will I send?" Remember what Isaiah said? He said, "I will go. Here am I, send me, Lord." Jeremiah is called without consent. In fact, I'm going to read verses 5 and 6 and these are those verses that we oftentimes use to defend what we might call the voice of life, or the life movement, and rightfully so, but I want you to see what it says in verse 5 of chapter 1,

5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. 6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

There's this passage where it says that the Lord knew him before he was even in the womb, and I understand that that's one of those verses that we use to defend the life movement, but I want you to notice the last statement, "I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Jeremiah finds himself in very limited company. There are three individuals in your Bible that God called to a specific purpose before they were even in the womb. Jeremiah was the first one chronologically speaking. According to what we just read, before he was conceived God set him aside and said, "You are going to be a prophet to the nations." Now remember, Jeremiah's different than any other prophet, commissioned not to marry and not to have a family. He's the only one who the Lord said, "You will not propagate your family lineage." Alright?

The second person, John the Baptist. Remember John the Baptist is in his mother's womb, Elizabeth, and when she hears the message from Mary that the Messiah is in her womb, remember what happens with John the Baptist? It says that the Holy Spirit left within him. We're not born with the Holy Spirit within us but what do we discover about John the Baptist? He had a special calling prior to his birth. In fact, Malachi 4, he's one of the last persons mentioned that he would come before the Messiah. Matthew 14, Jesus said, "If you receive me, this man," being John the Baptist, "is Elijah." Do you notice

similar about John the Baptist to Jeremiah? He did not have a family and he did not have children.

You know who the third one is, right? Jesus Christ. Before he was even conceived in the womb, he is the Lord himself purposed, planned with a mission. And again, no matter what some of the popular books or movies may say, never had a family and never had any children.

Now what's unique about that is that Jeremiah was called before he was even conceived, before he was even in the womb, the Lord said, "I am going to establish you. I am going to purpose you." You realize what you and I know today as the church of Jesus Christ was called out long before Acts 2. I mean, we usually talk about Acts 2 as that's the birth of the church, and I understand that it's Pentecost, I understand that the Holy Spirit descends, I understand that what we know as the 3,000 being saved and baptized, I get all that. It is the physical public manifestation of what we know as the church but the Lord prophesied a long time before that that he would call people unto himself. In fact, you go back into Isaiah, that other prophet, and one of the things that you discover is there in Isaiah 42, Jesus Christ the Messiah long before his birth and his ministry, that he was called the elect of God. You go into chapter 45 and it talks about the people of God being the elect of God. And so long before what we know as Acts 2, the Lord said, "This entity, this body, this bride, I am going to call unto myself."

Why is that important? Because as a believer in Jesus Christ, you are a part of the body of Christ that was, shall we say, it was called without your consent. The church is going to be the church whether you believe or not. The church was going to come into existence whether you wanted it to or not, and it's going to be in existence whether you want it or not. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 16 when Peter made this incredible profession of faith and remember he says, "Who do you say that I am?" By the way, do you know a lot of them said, "Well, some of them think you're Jeremiah. Some of them think you're Elijah. Some of them think you're a great prophet." He said, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus says, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you but my Father which is in heaven." And then Jesus goes on to say that the pit of hell could not destroy the church.

So that being said, the church of Jesus Christ, his body, his believers, the church was called without consent and so the church, and this is important in just a moment, the church could not be stopped from being initiated and the church cannot be stopped until the Lord calls it home, the same as with Jeremiah. The second thing I want to bring up and we've got to fast-forward to chapter 9. Now some of you who are math majors are thinking, "Okay, we're covering 20 chapters and we're already in chapter 9." Don't worry, we'll bog down here in just a moment. In chapter 9 is that Jeremiah was called to lamentation. Now I use that word specifically because the next book of the Bible is the book of Lamentations which the Lord gave Jeremiah those words. We sing those words on a frequent basis when we sing the great hymn, "Great is Thy faithfulness, new every morning." That comes from the book of Lamentations. In Jeremiah 9, verse 1, I want you to hear what Jeremiah says about what God has called him to do. Now we're long past his

birth and his childhood. We now have a mature prophet of God who's speaking to the people of God. He says,

1 Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

Now why is that an important passage for us? Lamentation means to weep. In fact, Jesus in Luke 19, he comes over the hill of Jerusalem that final time of the Passover where he would be given as a sacrifice for our sin, and there it says that he wept over Jerusalem because they couldn't get it. He wept over them because they continued to rebel, they continued to stay in their sin. And one of the things that I have learned and this is where we're going to make it a little bit personal is that as a believer in Jesus Christ there are times of weeping, is there not? Weeping because just like Jesus and just like Jeremiah, why don't they get it? Now I'm going to be honest and transparent tonight. There are times where I get in the flesh and what I mean by getting in the flesh, there are times that I hear stories, I hear people's stories, I'm watching what's happening in the world and my response is, "What is wrong with you people?" That's my flesh crying out. But then once I sit back and think about it, I begin to truly weep at the darkness of our world, the despair of our world, the depravity of our world.

You know, one of the things that we discover with Jeremiah is that very few people heeded his message. If we were to go back to Isaiah, when the Lord called Isaiah, he said, "Only a tenth of the people are going to pay attention." We remember that even though it was favorable, the great prophet Elijah after he defeats the Baal worshipers, he falls on his knees and he says, "O Lord God, I'm the only one left!" And he says, "Oh, don't worry there are 7,000 that have yet to bend the knee." The problem was that 7,000 was still a very small statistical percentage. One of the lamentations that we have as believers is that from our inception, shall I say manifestation in Acts 2, there have only been very few times where we were not a statistical minority. There's been very few times where we have had a great voice within the culture. The problem that most of us are having today is that one of those seasons was in our recent past. In Western civilization from about the mid, the late 1700s unto about the early to mid 1900s, what we know as the message of Jesus Christ was prominent in most communities. I mean, think about it, Western civilization the last 300 years is home to the first Great Awakening, the second Great Awakening, the Layman's Prayer Revival, the tent revival movement, the Graham crusades. I mean, when you look back there's been a great harvest, there's been a great numerical percentage and yet today we find ourselves on the side of history. In fact, as you look back on the last 2,000 years, the people of God have wept more over their cities than they have rejoiced.

I'll never forget one of my dear professors in seminary had a statistic he shared with me some years ago. He said from the year 2000 to the year 2015, that's a 15 year span, pretty good statistical metric there, not one county, not one county in the United States has a greater percentage of born again Christians in 2015 than in 2000. Not one. Weeping over Jerusalem. Weeping over the people. What did Jeremiah do? He wept over them because these people who he was crying out to, who he was saying, "Thus saith the Lord," they

would rather go to Babylon than repent of their sins. Is that not our world today? We have an entire world that would rather blow open the doors of hell than admit that their life was a sin. They're not going to do it. They don't want to do it and they are defiant against it. In fact, we've become a culture that celebrates our sin and no longer hides it in shame. He lamented. He wept. He had tears flowing for that which was around him. Now I know at times we get frustrated, I know at times we become despondent, but the God called life as a believer in Jesus Christ, it causes tears to well up when you realize what the world really looks like and what we're really walking through.

The third thing that we discover about Jeremiah is found in chapter 11, verses 18 through 21, that he was called to a curse. I'll unpack and explain that in a minute. Beginning in verse 18 of chapter 11 it says,

18 And the LORD hath given me knowledge of it, and I know it: then thou shewedst me their doings. 19 But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. 20 But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause. 21 Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand:

Now if you haven't had the privilege of walking through Jeremiah with us in our Bible reading plan, let me share with you what's happening, the same thing that you see over and over and over again, and let me warn you, this next week's reading, you're going to see what we just read happen numerous times, is that these people in the name of God, in the name of religion beg Jeremiah to quit preaching, "Thus saith the Lord." The same thing happened to Amos and the other prophets as well. But he says in verse 19, "I have been brought to the slaughter like an ox or like a lamb." It's interesting that what we discover as of all the people in Israel at this time, why would Jeremiah be seen as the enemy? I mean, think about it, all he's trying to do is help them, all he's trying to do is saying, "You're going down the wrong path." I mean, after all, these same people in just a few chapters are going to find themselves in the Babylonian captivity and his entire message is, "I don't want you to go." His entire reasoning for saying, "Thus saith the Lord," is he wants the best for them. I mean, we talked about it this morning but in chapter 29 the Lord says, "I know the plans I have for you, the plan to prosper you, not to harm you." And so even though he called them to repentance, even though he called them to return to the Lord, he never wished harm on them. All he was trying to do was help.

Luke 9:23 it says, "If any man come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." Now for the sake of time, I promise I won't go off too long of a journey here, but one of the things that just completely, I guess just befuddles me and it's in the same line as Jeremiah, is that we live in a culture and in a society today where many people in the name of Jesus Christ exhaust their resources and their energy to help others, and yet we

live in a culture that if you listen to the pundits the real enemy of our culture is the church. Have you ever thought about that? When's the last time you saw an atheist hospital? When was the last time you saw a Muslim hospital? When's the last time you saw a hospital in the name of anything other than a charitable organization that typical is faith-based? There's Baptist hospitals, Methodist hospitals, Catholic hospitals, Jewish hospitals. The majority of those who are trying to help people have some type of faith system behind them. Think about what happens when disasters occur, when there's a hurricane or a tornado, a tsunami around the world, whatever it may be, the majority of the time those who are the first on the scene, you guessed it, are faith-based. How many people and you think about just even this last week and I know we participated here locally but we saw the news stories of all these people that fed people on Thanksgiving, I didn't see the local philosophy club feeding people, did you? Who were the ones that were feeding? Churches and ministries based on the faith of a local congregation.

Why is that important? Because Jeremiah says, "You know, the more I try to help you, the more you blame me for the problems in the world." You know, I'm not going to be overly specific this evening so I don't like to give names but I'm going to tell you a story about one of my sons. I'm not going to tell you his name but he has two younger brothers. He's now a college student. You know, he said, "Dad, it's funny that as I take history in college, I'm being told that all the problems of the world are the Christians' fault, that if the Christians would just shut up, everybody would be happier, if we would just quit making our stand on what the Bible says about things, then we could all live in peace and sing Kumbayah." Do you find it interesting that the only entity that we have in this world that brings light in the world is what the world says is the problem?

In fact, you get to the book of Revelation 11, there's two guys that show up in the end days. It's the two witnesses, and we're not going to debate today of who their identity may be. But these two witnesses who are prophesying the truth of God's word in these last days, they're slain in the streets. Do you know what the Bible says that culture does? That when these two men die, they celebrate, they send each other presents and they sing and rejoice over their death. You know, I find it interesting that today, at least in our culture, the church's demise is actually being celebrated by the world because they actually believe they'd be better off without us. That's exactly what happened to Jeremiah. They said, "Jeremiah, if you would just quit talking, if you would quit saying this is what God wants, quit calling us to repentance, just let us live our lives. Let us do what we want to do and let us do what feels right." Does that not sound contemporary to you? And he says, "I was like an ox or a lamb that was taken to the slaughter."

You know, this morning in between our two services, had an individual pull me aside and they said, "Jeff, I want to thank you for continuing to preach the truth of God's word." For those of you who may not know First Baptist, Opelika, we've been here since 1859 and we have a very long heritage of, "Thus saith the Lord." That being said, the specific conversation I had with this individual was the fact that I continually remind us that if things continue the way that they're going and we continue to stay strong on the word of God, the days ahead may not be pretty. Allow me to use the word persecution may arise. There may be a day where myself as a pastor, you as a Sunday school teacher, you as just

an individual, the simple reading out loud of a verse of Scripture may be considered hate language because God calls some things sin that the world celebrates, and for it to be deemed hate language and for it to be deemed detrimental to a culture, there may be consequences therein. I hate to share this with you but I'm just being transparent this evening, the persecution of the church in our culture is not a matter of if, it's a matter of when and how bad. I don't know if it will be in the terms of tax issues or actually incarceration issues. I don't know what the Lord will bring upon us but I do know this, if they wanted to slaughter Jeremiah, then why wouldn't they want to slaughter us when we say, "Thus saith the Lord"?

And so called to a curse. Now this leads naturally into the next one, it's there in chapter 12, you and I are called to a message, and you're going to see here in chapter 12 that Jeremiah does not bend and he does not budge. The temptation would be, "Well, let's just soften the message." The temptation would be to say, "Well, you know what? The heat's getting turned up, maybe we need to do what they say and just go to a different pasture." Listen to what it says in verse 1 of chapter 12. It says,

1 Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? 2 Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins. 3 But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.

By the way, it doesn't necessarily fit in with the specific message here but notice what it says in verse 5,

5 If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

Here's what Jeremiah's saying, "They tried to tell me to soften the message. They tried to tell me to go and preach somewhere else. But God, I'm going to keep on preaching, if need be, bring judgment down upon them." Let me tell you what Jeremiah did: he doubled down is what he did. He said, "The more they tell me to be quiet, the louder I'm gonna get. The more they tell me to go somewhere else, the more I'm gonna get right into their business." He did not revoke, he did not change, and he did not alter the message.

Now let me share with you something about the message. If you were to go, I'll just go ahead and call it out, if you were to go to Walmart and look at their "Christian section," you would think that the entire biblical message is prosperity, wealth, health and a good day but that's really a small piece of the message. In fact, one of the things that we discover is the majority of the Bible is very negative in nature. Very negative. You know

the 10 Commandments, "Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt, not," it's pretty negative, is it not? Jesus Christ himself, for every statement he made on heaven, he made two on hell. What we know as the First Coming in Christmas, celebration, right? For every passage on Christmas, there are eight on the Second Coming which is judgment. The biblical record is very negative. From the moment that we get tossed out of the garden of Eden until the moment that Jesus Christ physically returns, it is a pretty negative book and the problem is, is there is a tendency to soften the message.

Now let me share with you something I've shared both privately and publicly. I'm a very biblically-based conservative person, I'm just not angry about it. I'm just not angry. But truth is truth and one of the temptations that we have is to soften the message in the midst of the persecution, one of the temptations we have is to say, "Well, we won't address that issue or we won't talk about this, we won't deal with that one because there's a lot of heat out there, there's a lot of, shall we say, backlash, there's a lot coming contrary to us." What did Jeremiah say? He said, "No, the very fact that they want me to hush, I'm gonna get twice as loud."

Now you do this and you don't even realize it. If you attend in person, I know it's a COVID world, but if you attend in person a sporting event, a basketball game, a football game, baseball game, whatever it may be, and in the midst of that game if somebody wearing the opposing team's paraphernalia, if they turn around you and say, "Hey, would you just be quiet," what do you do? You get louder because you know it's getting on them, right? You're not being ugly to them, are you? You're just cheering for your team. Is that not what we as believers do when we say, "Thus saith the Lord"? We are championing the message of the Lord. We are championing what the Scriptures say.

So when Jeremiah was tempted to soften the message, when Jeremiah was confronted with, "Hey, can we just tone it down a little bit?" What does he say to the Lord? "I'm about to double down." Now I don't believe that we should "speak and preach out of spite, out of anger, or out of retaliation," but I don't think that we should be silent. Truth is truth whether we like it or not. You know, Winston Churchill, the great leader of Britain during World War II which ironically they voted him out of office after he won the war but that's a whole other story, he said, "You know, truth's a funny thing. You can ignore it, you can deride it, and you can pretend it's not there but at the end of the day it's still there." You cannot deny, "Thus saith the Lord."

The next aspect of Jeremiah's life we find in chapter 15 and this one can get really personal with each and every one of us. The calling of God is for life. Now let me kind of revisit as you're going to chapter 15. The church as a whole was called without consent, lamentation when we see the world that we're walking through, to a curse, we're going to be belittled by the masses and not appreciated, to a message that is typically negative, not positive. By the way, when you tell people they need a Savior, that's a negative message. Why do you need a Savior? Because you have a sin problem and that's not a positive thought. But the calling is for life. Verse 18 of chapter 15. It says,



18 Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail? 19 Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.

Here's what we discover about Jeremiah: though he did not, he wanted to quit. He wanted to. Read verse 18, "Why is my pain perpetual? Why is my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Why am I going through this?" You hear the despair, you hear the cry of him saying, "God, I'm done." You know, there's an old joke about pastors, we preach on Sunday and everybody tries to quit on Monday. How many times as a believer whether it's in the workplace, the schoolhouse, even your own family, how many times have you cried tears at night saying, "I'm tired of this. This is hard." And you just want to quit. Well, the good news is Jesus said that nothing or no one can take us out of your hand, so technically you cannot quit but isn't it comforting to know that Jeremiah wanted to? Isn't it comforting that here is this man, the Lord gives us 52 chapters from his life and yet there were days where he said, "This is tough and I don't know if I can keep going on."

You know, one of the things that I find comforting in life is when people have walked the same path I have and I discover that they had the same emotions, they had the same responses, they had the same difficulties, they had the same tears, they had the same anger, whatever it may be. It's good to know that Jeremiah struggled, that Jeremiah got bogged down by what he saw around him and the fact that nobody was listening. I mean, you think about it, here's a man that not only had to preach captivity is coming but he actually had to live it out.

Now think about some of the other great prophets. Think about Hosea. He actually had to buy back his wife who had become an indentured harlot. Think about Isaiah, he preached for three years and no one listened. Let me make it contemporary, think about Judson, the great missionary to India that went seven years without a single convert. How many of us would have quit in year six? How many times do we say, "Is it worth it? Every time I open my mouth there is opposition. It seems like I've become more and more of a statistical minority as far as the world is concerned." Are there not days and maybe I'm the only one in the room, where you just say, you know, "God, I just don't know if I can do this anymore. I don't know if I can live like this anymore. I don't know if I can continue." Well, guess what? Jeremiah, he wanted to as well and what does the Lord say? "If you'll return, I'll bring thee with me again."

And we talked about this this morning and we're not going to go into chapter 18 with the potter's wheel, but the Lord was doing is he was shaping him and he was molding him, and one of the things that I've discovered is oftentimes the way the Lord teaches us is through the difficult days. Not the success. It's easy when you're winning, it's hard when you're losing. Anybody can sing the songs of faith when everybody's well and money is prosperous. Do you know when it's hard to sing? It's when you're hurting and you don't

have anything. That's when it's tough, and it gets tough out there sometimes and it's difficult but one of the things we discover is that the calling is for life, even if life doesn't go the way that we'd hoped.

In 2 Timothy 4 the Apostle Paul, by the way not speaking necessarily to a "pastor or preacher," but just to Christians in general, he says, "Be ready in season and out of season." Let me tell you what in season and out of season means. It means when you're excited about it and when you're not. When you can't wait and when you don't want to.

I started this evening with a pretty bad preacher joke so can I throw another one in the middle? There's the old story and I'm sure you've heard this little joke. It's told a hundred different ways so just endure me, about a man who Sunday morning is lying in bed, his wife has come in numerous times to the bedroom saying, "Honey, it's time to get ready for church. We need to get going to church." He keeps rolling over. He continues to not get out of bed and finally the clock is ticking and she said, "Honey, you need to get ready for church." And he says, "I'll tell you what, if you give me three good reasons to go to church, I'll go." She said, "Okay, first reason is it's the right thing to do." True. What's the next reason? "You need to be a good example to your children." He said, "Okay, what's the third?" "You're the pastor. Come on, let's go."

If you've ever had those moments where you don't know if you can take another step with the Lord, isn't it good to know that Jeremiah was in the same shoes? He's saying, "I don't know if I can do this." We've been called in season, we've been called out of season.

The next thing is in spite of our circumstances. Go to chapter 20. Now some of you are saying, "Uh-oh, chapter 20 means we're almost done." You got it. Chapter 20, verses 1 and 2. There's another individual who is going to give Jeremiah some grief here. It says,

1 Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. 2 Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the LORD.

Let me share with you what happens here. Jeremiah is incarcerated because he won't stop preaching. Lest you think that is a biblical anomaly, open your ears to what's happening to Christians all around the world today. There are believers in Jesus Christ that are being persecuted for their faith on all six of the active continents. What we know as persecution is going to come to this continent. Again, as I shared earlier, I don't know exactly what it's going to look like but I do know this, it's never fun.

But the thing that I find interesting is that we're called in spite of our circumstances. Allow me to illustrate. The book of Acts 16, we have a man whom we call the Apostle Paul. He and Barnabas are in the inner cell of jail. They have been incarcerated for their faith. Now you and I both know that you should not be imprisoned just because you say Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation. That is not an incarcerated offense to have that faith, but nonetheless they were. That night, there's an earthquake, the doors open,

and the leader of the prisoners comes running in, he's going to kill himself because he believes they've all escaped and there is Paul and Barnabas sitting there, even though their stocks have been broken, they're sitting there in prison and he says, "Oh, sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Can I remind you what Paul and Barnabas were doing at midnight in that prison? They were singing. They were singing. Now I don't know about you but singing in prison is not what I would deem possibly what would happen. I mean, can you think about that? You're in the worst possible situation yet you're singing praises to the Lord.

We have been called as believers to say, "Thus saith the Lord," and to celebrate the faith no matter what the circumstances are, whether they be good or whether they be bad, and Jeremiah was actually put in the stocks. Now I'll give you a head's up to the next week's reading. He gets out of prison. So he understood that it was just for a season, it was just for a time period. It was not permanent. Can I ask you an honest question and I don't want a visible answer but how many of us are circumstantial Christians? What I mean by that is we celebrate the Lord when things are going good and we don't when they're not. We are to celebrate whether it's good or whether it's bad. We're to believe and to trust whether we like what we're going through or whether we don't. Again, in spite of our circumstances. Jeremiah stayed faithful.

Last but not least in verse 10, it says,

10 For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. 11 But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.

I want to focus in conclusion that the calling on our lives is often a lonely one. Notice what Jeremiah says, "all of my familiars have left me." Everyone who said, "Jeremiah, I'm with you," they weren't real excited about being put in prison, were they? They weren't excited about people telling them to go to a different place.

You know, one of the things that I've learned, I've almost spent three years in what we might call vocational ministry, I've noticed that now as I'm entering my third decade, there's a whole lot of guys who are no longer serving as in days past for a lot of different reasons. It's lonely. It's lonely being the only one at the office who stands for the truth of God. It's lonely when you're the only one in your family who's a believer. It's lonely when you're the only one in a restaurant who bows and prays over your food. It's lonely out there.

You know that Jeremiah had one friend, his name was Baruch. Just one, one good friend. Paul at the end of his ministry said, "Everybody has abandoned me. Only Luke, the physician, is still with me." Jesus Christ, he goes into Jerusalem on what we know as

Palm Sunday and how many people are there? Tens of thousands saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Circumstances were pretty good, were they not? A few days later when they hung him on a cross, was Peter there? No. James? No. Bartholomew? No. Only one. For three and a half years, for three and a half years Jesus Christ had taught, walked, fed, healed, done everything, and according to John 19, the only one of the original apostles that was at the foot of the cross was whom we know as John the beloved. That's it. So if Jeremiah only had one, and if Paul only had one, and if Jesus Christ only had one, then why would we expect more?

Oftentimes doing what the Lord has called you to do, oftentimes living the life he's called you to do is very lonely but what does he say in verse 11? "But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one," and that's a good thing, by the way. Let me remind you of Psalm 27:10, it says, "When my mother and my father abandon me, forsake me, the Lord will lift me up and he will provide others in their stead." Elijah thought he was the only one and there were 7,000 others. Jeremiah had Baruch, Paul had Luke, Jesus had John. Why is this important? Because the last time I checked, in the midst of all that we've shared about Jeremiah and all that we've shared about our culture today, if we are surrounded by a multitude of people singing our praises, then we have to question what's the message that we're singing. When you say, "Thus saith the Lord," when you call out that we are sinners in need of a Savior, when you call out that the "thou shalt not's" are still relevant for today, it rarely is popular, it's usually condemned, and typically it doesn't draw a large crowd.

I mentioned earlier about the counties in America and their decrease in the percentage of born again Christians. The research is out, you can go to the sacred sources, you can go to the secular sources, the number of evangelical Christians in America, and by the way that's not someone who votes a certain way, that's someone who believes a certain way, an evangelical Christian believes that the Bible is true, Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death and rose from the grave physically and is returning again one day, we're down to less than double digits. According to the best sources, we're about 8-9%. It's lonely. It's lonely in the workforce. It's lonely at the schoolhouse.

You know, 30 years ago we would say that what we know as the Christian environment was probably a little better than today but I remember I went to a high school that in terms of Alabama was a 7A school, it was a large school, and I was part of an organization known as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We had over 2,000 students in our school, in fact, we had almost 3,000, and when we would meet as believers, our average attendance was eight. Eight. It's lonely knowing that there's a whole lot more people doing other things.

I know the weather was bad tonight and I'm not belittling anybody who didn't come but let's just talk about not only Sunday night, Sunday morning. Can we just agree there's a very small number of people who go to church versus those that don't? Just in our culture. You don't believe me, call in sick one Sunday and drive around town and watch where people are driving. We have become a place and a culture where those who are like-

mindful of faith are few and far between and you're going to have times where you say, "Am I the only one?" Guess what? Jeremiah had those same moments as well.

Why is tonight important? Because the God called life is not easy. The God called life is not one of popularity. It is much the opposite. That being said, tonight is not one of those nights that as a salesman would be appealing but truth is truth. Jesus Christ calls us to take up our cross and to follow him.

As we're continuing in our pandemic COVID world, at least on Sunday evenings, whether here in person or online, if you're one of those individuals who says, "You know what? I need to talk some things out. I need to pray with somebody. I need to be prayed for." We have a phone number that you can text us. It's actually the easiest way. It's 334-231-2313. Do us a favor, reach out to us. We would love to hear from you, talk with you, whatever we can do to assist you as we walk down these paths. Before I pray and we close, though, let me remind each and every one of us that it is our goal as we roll into 2021 to return at least to a schedule that looks like before the pandemic. That is our hope. That is our prayer and that is our desire, and when that does occur, things will look at least on the outside a whole lot like what they did before this pandemic broke out, at least as far as our structures are concerned. So at least for the season, we will continue the all you can eat Baptist Bible buffet on Sunday evenings but the day is coming quickly where hopefully we shall return to that which we knew in days past.