

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a king. He approached the head Monk named Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a monk and to spend the rest of his life in the monastery. "Your Majesty," said Monk Richard, "do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king."

"I understand," said Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

"Okay, then we start immediately, and I will tell you what to do," said the head Monk Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you." So King Henry did. When King Henry died, a statement was announced: "The King learned to rule by being obedient."

What is your calling? When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good engineer, nurse, accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us, and when he returns, we'll co-rule together with Christ.

God called Jeremiah to stand firm in the middle of a crumbling culture.

1. God's spokesman, appointed by God. (v.4-10)

Here in the first chapter, Jeremiah shares how he had come into the position as prophet. It was literally the clear voice of God, literally calling out to Jeremiah to become a prophet. Jeremiah tells us this in verse 4.

Verse 4, *"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.'"*

God knows all people while still in the womb. Christians are pro-life. We believe abortion is killing a baby that God.

God had not just destined Jeremiah for salvation, but God also destined Jeremiah for the work of a prophet. When? BEFORE God formed Jeremiah in the womb. The concept is repeated again in the second part of verse 4. *"Before you were born, I consecrated you"* This means that God chose Jeremiah. God chooses every single individual according to God's will. God chooses the number of their days. God chooses whether they are prophets or something else. God chooses whether they are male or female.

Who is fit to be a prophet of God? No one. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:16 about us being the aroma of Christ to the world, and then wrote, *"...who is sufficient for these things?"* Which human being is good enough to represent Christ? None of us. And yet we are chosen by God, and consecrated, sanctified, and made righteous by faith in Christ.

God created the lungs and voice of a prophet, the mind of a prophet, the heart of a prophet.

In Galatians 1:13, the apostle Paul wrote about how he formerly persecuted the church. Then in Galatians 1:15, Paul wrote, "...when *He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...*"

Back to Jeremiah. In verse 4, we read that God appointed Jeremiah "*a prophet to the nations.*" Why did God use the title 'prophet to the nations,' since Jeremiah never went to preach to another nation, such as Jonah did when he preached to the Ninevites, and Jeremiah never traveled to other countries? The answer is that although God appointed Jeremiah to be a preacher for His people in Judah, the teachings were true for all nations. Through Jeremiah, God gave messages to the Babylonians, to the Egyptians, and to the Moabites, for example. The authority of God's prophet extends beyond just the church. God speaks through His ministers to the heathen in all the nations.

How did Jeremiah respond to this call? You would think that Jeremiah would immediately receive the call, and be ever so honored! But in verse 6, Jeremiah tells us what actually happened next. Jeremiah refused the position of Prophet of God. Verse 6, "*Then [Jeremiah] said, 'Ah, LORD God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.'*" The word youth is taken symbolically. It was not Jeremiah's age that concerned him. It was his lack of knowledge. How was Jeremiah supposed to know what to say? Jeremiah considered himself unprepared for such an important role.

It was humility and modesty in Jeremiah that caused him to object. Jeremiah genuinely did not desire to become a prophet. So, God would need to constrain Jeremiah to do it. Will God force Jeremiah to do it? Yes, In verse 7, the LORD said to Jeremiah, "*Do not say, 'I am only a youth,' for to all whom I will send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.*"

God has a right to command Jeremiah to speak, and to have Jeremiah speak. All that was left for Jeremiah to do was to obey.

How is it that some people have such boldness and audacity to promote themselves to the work of the Lord, without being called? On the other side, how is it that people who are called, later think that they can quit?

Verse 8, "*Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares The LORD.*" God gives an answer to the problem of Jeremiah's fear. The answer? Do not fear. How? By knowing that God is with Jeremiah to deliver him! The people would not respond well to the message that Jeremiah was bringing. But

God says to disregard them, and to weigh more heavily the presence and power of God.

Verse 9-10, *“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.”*

In what way does Jeremiah destroy and overthrow? With words – with the words of God. In the same way that Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, *“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”* God’s true teachers, who are armed with God’s Word and God’s Spirit, have the power to destroy the arguments and opinions of our culture.

2. God’s message, illustrated by God. (v.11-16)

Verse 11, *“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Jeremiah, what do you see?’”* And I said, *“I see an almond branch.”*

God’s message came to Jeremiah. There is a play on two Hebrew words here. The Hebrew word for waking is *shoqed*, and the Hebrew word for almond is *shaqed*. Imagine you are in a park with a friend, and you sit on a bench and you are looking at a weeping willow tree, and your friend asks, “What are you looking at?” and you say a weeping willow. And your friend responds, I am weeping too. But instead of weeping willow tree, this was the waking tree, which we call an almond tree. The almond tree was probably named this because it is the first to wake up in the Springtime. The play on words deepens as the discussion moves forward. God asked Jeremiah what do you see, and Jeremiah answered, I see watching. In verse 12, the play on words reaches yet another level, since God responded, *“You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it.”*

God showed Jeremiah that God is awake and watching. God never goes into hibernation. God makes sure that His message gets fulfilled. God is seeing to it that all of His promises are accomplished. God’s Word will burst into flower like the almond blossoms in the Spring.

Next God gave a second illustration. Jeremiah sees a pot of stew boiling on an open fire, and tilting badly on the stones underneath, threatening to spill. It may be a danger to a child playing nearby. The pot is tilting from the North toward the South. With this boiling pot, God illustrates three truth points to Jeremiah.

- 1) Truth one, from verse 14, there is a danger from an enemy to the North. Eventually in our study, we will see that the danger was Babylon, which was geographically located to the East, but would end up attacking from the North. The pot is Babylon.
- 2) Truth two, from verse 15, the people needed to remember who is in charge in times of danger. God. Read in verse 15, where God says, “*For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the North’ declares the LORD...*” Those who heard Jeremiah’s prophecies live, must grasp the truth that even enemy armies, when they attack God’s people, are doing so because of God’s command. Later readers of Jeremiah’s book, who had already been taken as prisoners, must remember that it is God who was angry with them for their sins. They must be driven to God in repentance. Same for Christians today – we let all suffering drive us back to God.
- 3) Truth three, from verse 16, the people needed to remember the reason that God was sending a foreign army to attack them. Verse 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.*” What was the reason for the attack? God’s judgment on the wickedness of His people. Fascinating. Whatever military goals the countries had, whatever political agendas the nations had, God’s governance of the situation was purely moral and spiritual! What is the sin? Breaking the first commandment - no other gods before Me. To say it in one word – IDOLATRY! Idolatry had dismal consequences on the spiritual life of the people, and on the social life of the nation. It is the same today. The governor of the state of California at a news conference after one of the many shootings this past spring, and said, “What is wrong with our country?” Biblically, the answer is – we will not worship the one true and living God. Idolatry!

4) 3. God’s prophet, accompanied by God. (v.17-19)

Verse 17 is God telling Jeremiah what to do, “*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.*” Dress yourself for work is a statement alerting a person to get ready for a difficult task. We might say, get your running shoes on. This is Jeremiah’s first day on his new job! This is Jeremiah’s surprise calling from God. And right at this moment, God revealed to Jeremiah that this is going to be a very challenging career. Gear up. Get your combat boots on!

Consider how Paul the preacher knew whatever God had asked him to preach must be preached, in order for Paul to be free from responsibility for the

audience, in Acts 20:26-27, “...*I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*”

Furthermore, Paul recognized that he was not a hero for preaching the message God gave him, but that it was mandatory and unavoidable task. In fact, Paul would be in trouble with God if he did not preach, as we read clearly in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “*For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*”

Pastor Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the 1500s, said in his later years, “Although I am now an old man, and an experienced preacher, yet I tremble as often as I go up into the pulpit.” It is not easy, as Jeremiah could agree.

Verse 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.*”

This makes it sound like God would make Jeremiah into a superhero. Verse 18 sounds like the famous intro for Superman - “Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound! (“Look! Up in the sky!” “It’s a bird!” “It’s a plane!” “It’s Superman!”)” What does verse 18 say about Jeremiah. God will make him into a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls. It may sound like an exaggeration, but consider the end of the story - that the literal walls of Jerusalem literally fell down, and Jeremiah was still standing. It came true. When Judah lost sight of true religion, they can come back to Jeremiah to find it. That is the job of Christians today. When America has lost sight of true religion, we can come back to gospel Christians to find it again. Spiritual heroes while our country is morally crumbling.

Verse 19, “*They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you.*”

Notice something as we come to the end of our study of chapter 1. Notice that verse 8 and verse 19 say the same thing, that God would deliver Jeremiah. When others fight against Jeremiah, God will be with Jeremiah, and God would deliver Jeremiah. What a great promise. Now, I want you to notice something else. God does not offer to Jeremiah to prevent him from being attacked. No prevention promised. Indeed, Jeremiah will be attacked. Instead, what God offered to Jeremiah was that God will deliver Jeremiah.

What does that mean? It means that God is communicating to Jeremiah literally from day one, that Jeremiah should prepare himself to suffer. Suffering is a part of a preacher’s life. Suffering is a part of the life of every follower of God. In fact, if it were not for God’s deliverance, it would be all over for Jeremiah, and

if it were not for God's rescue of us, it would be all over for us. Since we have God's deliverance promised to us, there is no real danger. There is no reason for us to fear. A thousand other people might get destroyed, but we will not be destroyed.

Pastor John Trapp a pastor in England in the 1600s, said, "What can all the wicked do against one minister armed with God's presence and power?"

There was something strong and reassuring to Jeremiah about God's promise. God had always engaged in such rescuing activity. The classic example is the Exodus, when in the face of a powerful opponent like Pharaoh, God brought His people through the Red Sea on dry ground.

Jeremiah seems to have had a sense of kinship with Moses. Moses had seen God's strong actions working to save His people. God stretched out His hand again and again to rescue His people in the Book of Exodus and in the lifetime of Moses. We will see that in our study of the Book of Jeremiah and in the life of Jeremiah.

To Jeremiah on this first day, the day of his call, there must have been only an appalling prospect of the task before him, for which he felt poorly equipped.

Jeremiah was scared. But Jeremiah was the right man. Jeremiah could see the need for a prophet like Moses in his generation. Someone must preach God's Word in those dark times. The people had grown careless.

Jeremiah did accept the task, strengthened by the idea that God would be on the watch. God would carry out God's purposes. God would stand by His servant Jeremiah.

What is the promise of God to us? His presence and power. Matthew 28:20, "...*behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" The presence of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit is ours as believers.

CROSS – Jesus Himself craved the presence of God the Father with Him. It was necessary for our rescue for Jesus to take our sins upon Himself. With our sins upon Jesus, the Father turned His face away. The full wrath of God the Father was poured out upon Jesus Christ to pay the penalty due for our wrongs. Jesus was hung there until He died, and shame was added when he was buried. It was only by the power of God seen in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that we were delivered from the clutches of death. We were rescued by Jesus being not rescued. We are given the abiding presence of God, by Jesus being abandoned.

It was not Jeremiah who was the strong one. It was Jesus. Jesus is the true fortified city. Christ is the genuine iron pillar. Our Savior is the bronze walls. The repentance preached by Jeremiah is the repentance that connects us to Christ by faith. We are safe only in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion: Be brave to stand firm in the strength of Christ, and for the glory of God. Bravery.

Maybe you are still trying to figure out God's plan for you. Many Christians long to know what God is calling them to do. If you are not sure, there are two things to do about it right away.

- 1) Bravely keep doing everything that you already know that God wants you to do. Spend time in prayer and Bible study, serve the people with whom you live, remain active in worship of the church, serve God in the church, and be God's witness to the world.
- 2) Bravely ask God to reveal His will for your life. James 1:5, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*" Keep your eyes open, because God always fulfills this promise to give us the wisdom for which we ask! And when the answer comes, do not resist it but rather bravely trust God as you walk in it throughout your lifetime. You won't have knowledge and experience at the beginning. But you have God from day one, just like Jeremiah. Stand firm in the strength of Christ. Since God did not accept excuses from Moses and Jeremiah, it is unlikely God will accept your excuses and give you something easier to do. Christ is not limited by our human weakness. God possesses what you need to answer His call. With God's calling on your life will come God's gifting to you to do it. The most common command in Scripture is, "Do not be afraid." What is fascinating, is that it is so often stated in the context of something to fear. God says, do not fear it anyway! We are immortal until we have finished God's planned service for us.

Maybe you are already into your field of study or well into your career, or you are even approaching retirement or already retired, but you are finding lately that our culture is changing at a surprisingly rapid pace. We will discover, like Jeremiah, that throughout our lifetimes, bravery is required to speak up in this culture, whether it is in family discussion, a church Bible study, a workplace encounter or out in public. To bring God's truth to the issues as they come up, will meet with resistance and opposition. We must brace ourselves for such a context for our Christian walk. We are called to be brave.

Why should we be brave? Because God is with us. God promises to remain at our side throughout our lives. When God first calls us to our tasks, He does not give us a road map to follow and then leave us to travel alone. God walks with us.

Another reason we should be brave? Because of the truth of God's Word. The word of God is universally valid in every situation and in every nation. We know that it is true. We actually have more power, because after all of the apparently dominant forces have had their say and shown their muscles, God will straighten it all out. Jeremiah is a book for a nation that is unraveling.

The LORD our God will issue the verdict on every nation and every person. We can be brave. The phrase in verse 19, Jeremiah picked up and used as a rallying cry. The phrase is "*declares the LORD.*" It is found in Haggai 11 times, in Zechariah 20 times, in Amos 21 times, in Isaiah 23 times, and in Ezekiel 83 times, but Jeremiah uses the phrase 176 times. The phrase "*declares the LORD*" is from a word that is translated "to whisper." God is letting us in on a secret. This knowledge of God's presence with us and God's power for our rescue, is what makes us brave to speak God's truth to a world that desperately needs it.

Do you get scared to speak up? So did Jeremiah and Moses and others.

God is never limited by our natural abilities or our limited experience, training and knowledge.

God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Bravery looks like being thick-skinned and able to withstand the hostility and ridicule of an unbelieving world, influenced by dark spiritual powers.

Ephesians 6:11, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*"

1 Peter 5:8, "*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*"

Be brave to stand firm in the strength of Christ, and for the glory of God. Romans 8:31, since "...God is for us, who can be against us?"