

## There is a God and We are Not Him

### Jeremiah 1:1-10

May 2nd, 2021

In a scene from the 1993 movie *Rudy*, young Daniel “Rudy” Ruettiger is talking to the former president of Notre Dame, Fr. John Cavanaugh. Rudy complains that his efforts have come to naught and soon his dream of playing football at Notre Dame will be over.

“Have I done everything I possibly can?” Rudy asks. “Can you help?” “Son, in 35 years of religious studies,” replies Cavanaugh, “I’ve come up with only two hard, incontrovertible facts: There is a God . . . and I’m not Him.”

*I wonder if the prophet Jeremiah could relate to a conversation like this? After all, God had called him to a nearly impossible ministry as a prophet to a people that would be overcome by enemy nations all around her. Jeremiah couldn’t have known what kind of suffering might be in his future, but, he did know his ministry wouldn’t be easy.*

As we explore the opening Scripture passage from the Book of Jeremiah this morning, a principle comes to mind when considering the impact of Christian ministry. The measure of ministry effectiveness isn’t success as that which is viewed from a human perspective - things like having a radio or television ministry, record numbers in worship attendance, multi-site locations or campuses, a bursting youth or children’s ministry, or flashy worship leaders. No, the true measure of success in ministry is faithfulness to God and His Word. Faced with the temptation to grow the impact of our ministry as far as we can tell, *will we resort to measures different than what God has spelled out for us in His Word?*

If anyone may have been tempted to do ministry his own way it would have to be Jeremiah. Jeremiah, like most of the prophets, was despised, ignored, persecuted, and abused. He was neglected, mocked and made fun of by his own people, and he was tempted sorely to swear off the ministry God entrusted to him. Surely, he may have thought, if this is the way of the Lord, I might try to look for another (easier) way!

Among my 10 favorite Old Testament texts is today’s sermon text, **Jeremiah 1:1-10**. Growing up, the name Jeremiah was in my mind due to other influences not necessarily that of sacred Scripture. Some of you will be able to finish this:

“Jeremiah was a bullfrog. Was a good friend of mine. I never understood a single word he said...(jump ahead to the refrain), “Singin’ joy to the world. All the boys and girls now. Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea; joy to you and me.”

### **Jeremiah 1:1-10:**

**1** The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who *were* in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, **2** to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. **3** It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

**4** Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: **5**“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

**6** Then said I: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I *am* a youth.” But the Lord said to me: “Do not say, ‘I *am* a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. **8** Do not be afraid of their faces, for I *am* with you to deliver you,” says the Lord.

**9** Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. **10** See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.”

The book begins with three verses that establish the setting of the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a preacher’s son, for his father Hilkiah was a priest. He was born in the village of Anathoth, close enough to Jerusalem to see the city walls, but at the edge of the wilderness, where the land slopes down to the Dead Sea. Jeremiah labored as God’s prophet for 40 years or more, 627 BC to some time after 586 BC.

In Jeremiah’s days, Israel was tossed around by three great superpowers: Assyria to the north, Egypt to the south, and Babylon to the east. Jeremiah served - and suffered (he is known as the weeping prophet) - through the administration of three kings: Josiah the reformer, Jehoiakim the despot, and Zedekiah the puppet. This was right up to the time God’s people were deported to Babylon. Jeremiah was exiled to Egypt instead, where he died.

### **Verses 4-10 contain four points:**

- 1 - **Call** - God calls Jeremiah to ministry.
- 2 - **Concern** - Jeremiah’s concern that he may not be up to the task.
- 3 - **Covenant** - God established a covenant with His people.
- 4 - **Commission** - God commissioned Jeremiah to do His (God’s) bidding.

**Verses 4-5 reveal God’s call to Jeremiah.** “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.’” God chose Jeremiah even before he was conceived or formed in his mother’s womb! God loved Jeremiah even before his

mother was pregnant with him; God set Jeremiah apart to the gospel ministry before he was born, and God selected Jeremiah to be his mouthpiece to His people before his lips became flesh. Yes, dear ones, there is a God, and we are not Him!

If this was true of Jeremiah, are there other biblical personalities with a similar profession of faith. Going back one book from Jeremiah to the one that precedes it, we read that Isaiah's story is similar to Jeremiah's:

- **Isaiah 49:1** - “Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord has called Me from the womb; from the inner parts of My mother He has made mention of My name.” And four verses later, we read - “And now the Lord says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him.”
- John the Baptizer is another - **Luke 1:15** - “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.”
- The Apostle Paul is yet another. This is **Galatians 1:15-16** - “**15** But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, **16** to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...”

*Does this pre-born calling of God's continue today?* It sure does! Birth is not our beginning. We have a beginning that goes far back to a point before time began! Verse 5 refers to God's knowing Jeremiah (us). “Knowing” in this case is the same thing as loving. God loved us, fellow Christian, before He formed us in our mother's womb!

That's what we read in **Romans 8:28-29** - “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew (loved before), He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” God loved us even before He made the world.

That's what we read in **Ephesians 1:3-5** “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, **4** just as He (God) chose us in Him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, **5** having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself,” There is a God, and we are not Him!

**Verse 6 reveals Jeremiah's concern about the deep truth God just revealed to him.** “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I *am* a youth.” Jeremiah was about 20 years of age when God's call was revealed to him. “O Father, you *do* know I'm just a

kid; nobody will take me seriously when I tell them they are sinners in need of salvation. You're sending me to the nations; I don't know their culture, language, or way of life. Surely, there are people with more maturity, ability, and creativity than me.

Moses had the exact same concern when God called him to lead His people out of Egypt. I had a similar response when Pastor Smith asked me to lead the Sunday evening worship service though we'd only been attending for a couple of months! "Uh, Pastor Smith, you do know that I wasn't raised a Presbyterian, nor had we actually been received as members of the church, and I'm a Yankee - surely, there is someone else who can do it besides me.

**God's response to Jeremiah** is to remind Jeremiah that God is building a kingdom on earth through a covenant relationship with redeemed sinners. Verses 7-8 - "But the Lord said: "Do not say, 'I *am* a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. **8** Do not be afraid of their faces, for I *am* with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

Nothing will come between God and His covenant kids; we are to plant the seeds and water them; God will bring the increase! Our part is easy - we just have to do what He says; He'll take care of the rest. There is a God, and we are not Him!

**The final point is God's commission to Jeremiah.** Verses 9 & 10, "Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. **10** See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."

Three Sundays ago, when we studied **Isaiah Chapter 6**, we saw a seraphim (a heavenly being like an angel) took a hot coal and touched Isaiah's lips with it. Here, the Lord Himself touches Jeremiah's lips symbolizing His Word coming back out of Jeremiah's mouth.

In proclaiming God's word to those God would send him, Jeremiah would be tearing up nations by the roots and turning them under. God would work through Jeremiah to tear down and destroy structures the people would erect that opposed God's kingdom expansion. Once the bad was dealt with, the good could be erected. God sure can do a lot through the faithful witness, preaching, and testimony of His Word.

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As we bring this to a close, I'd have you apply this passage to your own life. If you are a Christian, God has called you to take His Word into the world - first to your homes to evangelize unsaved children and family members, as that is happening, to the communities in which your church (you) ministers, and getting to know people you don't, and tell them about their need for Jesus. Your perceived reasons for not doing so don't mean that God won't work through your testimony, but it's a lot less painful to do it His way and not yours. There is a God and we are not Him.

*Where are the people who want to pursue pastoral ministry, who desire to serve in church office as an elder or deacon, to teach God's Word in the church's teaching ministries, to be missionaries in other parts of this country or overseas?* Christianity is no spectator sport; it is every one on the field with no one standing or sitting on the sidelines. The Church is an every member ministry opportunity. See Carolyn McCrory after worship to volunteer to serve that very important week of July 12 to 16.

I'd like to leave you with some practical considerations by Eugene Peterson about God's choice of Jeremiah:

"My identity does not begin when I begin to understand myself. There is something previous to what I think about myself, and it is what God thinks of me. That means that everything I think and feel is by nature a response, and the one to whom I respond is God. I never speak the first word. I never make the first move.

Jeremiah's life didn't start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah's salvation didn't start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah's truth didn't start with Jeremiah. He entered into the world in which the essential parts of his existence were already ancient history. So do we."