

**From Judgement to Hope – The Call of Jeremiah**  
**Week 1 – Jeremiah 1:1-19**  
**Rev'd Chris Johnson**

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This morning we commence our new series on the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah had one of the toughest gigs in the Bible. It was a time of great national turmoil as the superpowers of Assyria and Egypt wrestled for full control of Judah. Babylon was also in the ascendancy. Jeremiah had to tell the people that the pending invasion and exile was God's punishment for their sin and they needed to repent and turn back to God.

Being a prophet was never an easy job but especially difficult for Jeremiah who involved himself at a very high level with the political machinations of the day.

I imagine a Career Expo. You've got educational institutions with their stalls offering careers in the trades, in hospitality, in business, in law, in computing, in engineering, in medicine. I imagine great long queues of keen ambitious young people lining up at each of the stalls looking for a satisfying and lucrative career.

And then in the corner there is a tiny unassuming stall with the title Prophet. The poster on the stall says, -Are you ready for a challenge?

-Are you ready to be unpopular and lose all your family and friendship connections?

-Are you ready to speak the truth boldly and face the repercussions?

-Are you ready for violence and persecution.

Become a prophet today!

There is only one person attending this stall, and that is Jeremiah.

This will be a lonely life, a life of suffering. In the world's eyes, a wasted life.

But in God's eyes a precious life, lived well in obedience to God's call.

If you have your Bible with you please open to the book of Jeremiah.

If you are using the Pew Bible it's on page 751.

In the first three verses of chapter one Jeremiah is clearly identified as a historical figure living through the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah; Kings of Judah. He lived in Anathoth and his father, Hilkiah was a priest.

The book of Jeremiah shows us God at work in history, that God intervenes in history. He is concerned with people's behaviour, with people's decisions. He is interested in politics and religion; with the decisions leaders are making and what people are saying and doing. Jeremiah will bring a word from God in all of these areas. It will be a difficult word that causes him much grief.

In v's 4&5 we find the call. READ V4&5

The Call reveals a new centre, a new focus – GOD.

-It is God who formed Jeremiah in the womb.

-It is God who knew Jeremiah before he was born and set him apart.

-It is God who appointed him as a prophet to the nations.

Jeremiah is not going to be a prophet because of his choice. He hasn't looked around at all the careers on offer in his day and thought, "How interesting a prophet!" "Yes I think I have the

communication skills, enough knowledge of covenant law and great political judgement. I'll be a prophet."

- It isn't out of a sense of self importance that he will address kings.
- It isn't because of a personality flaw that he will denounce people for their sins.
- It isn't because of a perverse sense of enjoyment that he will preach judgement.

Jeremiah is going to become a prophet purely and simply because of God's call. These words are very simple yet profound. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

There is a theme of predestination here; God has Jeremiah's path mapped out before he could even say mummy or daddy. The purpose of predestination is not to confuse us and tie us up in intellectual knots. The purpose is to bring comfort. This clear call is what Jeremiah will have to come back to again and again to bring him comfort when all else is failing.

When the going gets really tough it's these words which will reassure Jeremiah that God is with him; God loves him and has known him even from before he was born. Nothing is going to happen in Jeremiah's life that takes God by surprise. Even although Jeremiah doesn't know the future, he knows the God who knows the future. The sovereign Lord is with him.

Verses 5 and 10 identify Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations. He will address powerful men and claim to have God's message for them.

Verse 10 explains this well. READ v10

There are six verbs here.

Four verbs of demolition- uproot, tear down, destroy and overthrow.

And there are two verbs of renewal - to build and to plant.

Jeremiah will remind the nations that God gives them their power and they are accountable to him. Their economic strength and military power is not just their own doing but only what God has allowed to happen. The nations need to recognise the Sovereignty of God and exercise their power with the justice and mercy of God. This is an incredible message Jeremiah has to speak to these great and mighty empires.

No wonder in verse 6 he says, "*Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am too young.*" This is not an uncommon reaction to a call from God. It echoes some of Moses reluctance, '*I don't know how to speak*'. In Jeremiah's case he probably had more justification for this response than any other prophet. Imagine a 16 year old today going to the leaders of the nations and telling them, "*I've got a word from God for you.*" I don't think they would get past the Information Desk let alone into the office of the Prime Minister. Jeremiah has every reason to be scared witless.

But what is God's answer? READ V's 7-9

God will give Jeremiah the words, God will put his words in Jeremiah's mouth. God will rescue Jeremiah when he gets into trouble. God reassures Jeremiah that he needn't be afraid.

We then have two very powerful images which God uses to help Jeremiah see the importance of the message he will proclaim. There is the creative promise of the almond tree in v11 and then the destructive image of the boiling pot in v13.

What's the meaning of the almond tree? The almond tree was the first tree to bud in spring. When Israelites saw these buds it was a sign spring had arrived. Jeremiah is a sign to the people of Judah and God is watching over him to see that the word Jeremiah speaks is fulfilled. Every spring when Jeremiah saw the almond tree in bud it would be a reminder and encouragement that God would fulfil his word through Jeremiah. It so happens that Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, was a centre for growing almonds so this would have been a vivid image for him.

The second image is of a boiling pot and it is tilting towards Judah from the north [v's 13-15]. This is a more ominous image. The nation had been invaded many times from the north. This was the location of Assyria and eventually will be the territory of the Babylonians who will indeed invade in 587BC. V15 makes it very clear that the image is about invasion.

V16 Gives the reason for this disaster. It will be a judgement of God upon his people for their idolatry. There will be a lot more to say about this in the weeks to come but simply to note these historical events are being controlled by the sovereign Lord and there is a theological reason for what is about to happen.

The chapter concludes in v's 17-19 with a rallying cry for Jeremiah to steel himself for the momentous task which lies ahead. The leadership of Judah and of the other nations might be powerful and intransigent, but God promises to make Jeremiah a fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall to stand against them. They will not prevail and the Lord will come to Jeremiah's rescue.

So what is the meaning of Jeremiah's call for us today and our call to obey God?

There are a number of ways in which Jeremiah's call was unique. He was a prophet to Judah in the 7th century. A time and a place very different from Australia in the 21st century. In the first place Judah was a theocracy. That meant they were God's chosen people, called to have a special relationship with God with a very special role as the means through which God would reveal himself to the world. God raised up prophets in Israel to speak to his people and through his people to the rest of the world. Jeremiah was one of these prophets. He has a unique place in God's salvation history in the Old Testament.

Australia is not a theocracy, we are not the chosen people and God is not continuing to write scripture through us. So there is no more direct revelation or people called to exercise a role such as Jeremiah's.

Having said that however, God does still call people to very special roles of leadership where they change the course of history. We need to pray for those leaders and that they will be faithful to God in what he's called them to do. If you are one of those people may God give you discernment and wisdom to know his will.

For most of us however, the influence we have will not make a huge impact on history. What is the general call on all Christians?

Well it is spelled out in the New Testament and has many facets; however what I want to focus on today is Jesus call for us to be witnesses. In Matthew Ch4 v19 Jesus says to the fishermen Simon and Andrew, "*Come follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.*" Jesus builds into the call to follow, the command to fish for others. This is at the beginning of Jesus ministry. This command is reinforced at the end of Jesus' ministry on earth in the Great Commission. Matthew 28:19, "*Go and make disciples of all nations.*"

The call to follow Jesus is a call to make him known and invite others to also follow, to also be his disciple.

The Vision Statement we have adopted in Vision 26 is, "Living to Love and Proclaim Jesus." The proclaiming is about heeding Jesus' words to Andrew and Simon to fish for people and taking the Great Commission seriously. The only question is how can we do this especially in a culture where an increasing number think being a Christian is a bit of an oddity.

Well one of our key strategies in Vision 26 is Alpha and we are planning to start our first course in October. Alpha can run for 8 weeks or 10 weeks. For our first Alpha we are going to go for eight weeks.

When you invite people to Alpha however, you're not inviting them to an 8 week course, you're simply inviting them to an Information Night which allows the them to decide if they want to go further. Hopefully they have such a fantastic time at the Introductory Night they want to continue. Our experience in the past is that about 75% to 80% of people do decide to continue.

Alpha is all about invitation. It's about inviting people to come and see. Everyone has questions about the meaning of life and there are very few places in our society where you can openly talk about those questions. Alpha is a safe place where no question or comment is silly and all views are respected.

Alpha is also about prayer. It is God who opens people's hearts to consider Jesus. It's not about us forcing the issue. It's about us joining in with what God is doing in someone else's life. Prayer opens hearts to seek God. We have a special method of praying for people to be open to God and Lynda will explain now that works a little later.

But do you have family and friends and you would love them to know Jesus?

The first step is to be praying for them. The second step is to invite them to an Alpha Information Night.

Alpha is one of our key strategies for achieving our vision of Living to Love and Proclaim Jesus. There will be more in the weeks to come on how Alpha will help us to do that.

The book of Jeremiah will be very helpful for us as we prepare for Alpha. While his situation was unique there are some parallels with our situation. The people of his day had turned their backs on God and were infatuated with their idols. Does that sound familiar?

The call of Jeremiah is a call to the Leaders of Judah to turn back to God. It is also a call to the people, to repent and seek the new heart that God promises.

Our call is to follow Jesus and to pray and work for others to become his followers as well. We may feel just as inadequate in our call as Jeremiah did in his. But in the end it is God who brings people to himself and he simply asks us to join in.

I love these CALL passages.

-Jeremiah was called to serve God with all the particularities of his day.

-We are called to serve God today by following Jesus.

May we be just as faithful as Jeremiah was.