Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/30/2026 Brad Brandt

Jeremiah 1 "Called to the Ministry"**[1]

Series: *Learning from the Lamenter: Living By Faith When Times Are Hard*

Main Idea: In Jeremiah 1 the Lord called Jeremiah into His service and the prophet began to live in the grip of that call. In this important passage we learn that the Lord's call involves three important God-initiated elements.

I. The Lord appoints His servant (1-10).
   A. The Lord revealed His purposes for Jeremiah (4-5).
      1. I knew you before you existed.
      2. I formed you.
      3. I set you apart before you were born.
      4. I selected you to be a prophet.
   B. The Lord addressed Jeremiah's objection (6-8).
      1. God doesn't choose His servants based on their adequacy.
      2. God chooses His servants based on His sufficiency.
   C. The Lord gave Jeremiah what he needed to fulfill his calling (9-10).
      1. In Christ, we too have been called.
      2. We were called to salvation.
      3. We were called to holy living and service.
      4. We were called to suffer.
      5. We were called to experience the power of God in our weakness.

II. The Lord assures His servant (11-16).
   A. He gave Jeremiah an object lesson: an almond tree branch (11-12).
      1. It would be a lifelong reminder of His watchful eye.
      2. It would be a lifelong reminder of His powerful Word.
   B. He gave Jeremiah an object lesson: a boiling pot (13-16).
      1. He revealed what was coming (14-15).
      2. He revealed why it was coming (16).

III. The Lord assigns His servant (17-19).
   A. He told him what to do (17).
   B. He told him what to be (18).
   C. He told him what to expect (19).

Make It Personal: Am I living in light of God's call?

Today as we continue our series on the life of Jeremiah, we'll be looking at Jeremiah's call to the ministry in Jeremiah 1. Before we read and behold God at work in the call of His servant, I'd like to share a pertinent story.

I met Duvai in 2001 and he told me a story that still amazes me. We were standing in a mission house on the edge of the jungle in Papua New Guinea when this middle-aged man told me a story. Duvai is an Angor who comes from a small clan in central PNG. In fact, his clan is so small that when his father and mother had their first son, the elders insisted that the child be killed due to a lack of land, and their decision was implemented.

Later a second son was conceived, but again the elders insisted, "We do not have enough land. This child too must die." And so, they strangled the baby to death (as Duvai explained) by choking it with a special vine from the jungle.

Then Duvai's mother became pregnant again. The same decision was reached by the elders. "The baby must not live. Not enough land." Consequently, when his mother gave birth, the vine was wrapped around the baby's neck, as with the other siblings.

But then something unexpected occurred. Duvai told me his father was a bigamist and his second wife saw the dying baby, she showed mercy and grabbed the child in her arms and ran off into the jungle. Due to this woman's kindness, the baby didn't die as had the others, but lived. "That baby was me," said Duvai.

As Duvai concluded his story, he told me he knew he was alive for a special reason. He believed that the Creator had spared his life so he could use his life for the good of his people. And so, Duvai lived with a sense of purpose. He was the first Angor to graduate

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**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] For a previous look at messages from the life of Jeremiah, see the WBC series in 2010.

from high school and eventually became an educator so that other children might experience the wonderful privileges he had lived to enjoy.

It makes all the difference in the world when you know you have a purpose for living. And here's the truth. We *all* have a purpose for living. Sadly, many don't know what that purpose is, but nonetheless we all have a purpose. Our purpose isn't something we design, but has been given to us by our Maker. We experience meaning and joy when we learn to live in light of that God-given purpose.

Do you know what your purpose is in life? More importantly, are you living in light of your God-given purpose?

Jeremiah was a man who knew why he was alive and lived to fulfill his purpose no matter what the cost. And there was a cost. There always is. Not only did Jeremiah preach an unpopular message of judgment to his own nation, but he also composed lamentations to help his people grieve and return to the Lord once the judgment hit.

How did he do it? How did this man choose to help the very people who hated him and treated him like a criminal and even tried to kill him? That's not natural. What's natural is to give the cold shoulder, or even retaliate with pain for pain. When somebody wrongs me, even if it's something trivial like cutting me off in traffic, I'm not thinking, "Okay, that was wrong, but what can I do to help that person now?"

So how did he do it? What motivated him? We need to know if we're going to live the kind of purpose-driven lives that please our Lord in our own day.

That's what this series is all about. We're calling it *Learning from the Lamenter: Living By Faith When Times Are Hard*. We're investigating four scenes from the book of Jeremiah. Last week we looked at a scene from the end of Jeremiah's life in Jeremiah 32. This morning we're going to go back to the beginning of the book that bears his name, where we discover an event that shaped Jeremiah for life.

We won't understand Jeremiah if we don't understand chapter one. More importantly, we won't respond like Jeremiah if we don't learn to see our lives the way Jeremiah began to see his life in chapter one. In chapter one Jeremiah experienced *the call of God.* Let's read the account.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 1

To put it simply, Jeremiah didn't volunteer for his lot in life. God called him to it. And the fact that he knew that God called him to be something and to do something made all the difference when the critics started harping and the arrows started flying. Jeremiah lived his life in the grip of God's call.

We can endure a lot if we know, first, that we are called to it, and second, that the One who called us has promised to supply us with every necessary resource to fulfill that calling. That's precisely what Jeremiah learned, and we can learn much from him.

In Jeremiah 1 the Lord called Jeremiah into His service and this call involved three God-initiated elements. I'd like to personalize the outline, for I believe that the Lord's call in our lives also involves these three divinely initiated elements.

I. The Lord **appoints** His servant (1-10).

II. The Lord **assures** His servant (11-16).

III. The Lord **assigns** His servant (17-19).

I. The Lord appoints His servant (1-10).

Notice how the book begins in verses 1-3, "The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one 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, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month."

His name is Jeremiah Hilkiahson (or son of Hilkiah if you prefer). His dad was a priest and his family lived in Anathoth, just three miles northeast of Jerusalem.

But Jeremiah apparently never entered the priesthood. The Lord had other plans for him which He made clear in 627 BC. You will be a prophet.

King Josiah was reigning in Judah at the time. In fact, Josiah reigned for another sixteen years after Jeremiah's call. It's worth noting that just five years after Jeremiah's call, Josiah instituted much needed reform and authorized a spiritual house-cleaning in the temple and throughout the land (see 2 Kings 22-23). But the revival under Josiah was short-lived, and moral conditions plummeted following the king's premature death.

And that was as good as it got for Jeremiah, ministerially speaking. While Jeremiah saw a glimmer of hope for his country at the beginning of his ministry, he then saw that glimmer snuffed out and spent the rest of his life preaching to a stony-hearted nation. I don't think we can fully appreciate what this man endured. Forty-plus years of preaching and pleading and praying with nothing to show for it but rejection. No wonder R. K. Harrison said, "Jeremiah is the most notable of the Hebrew prophets because of the almost impossible mission which God assigned to him."[2]

Like Ezekiel and Zechariah, Jeremiah was both priest and prophet. He was a priest by birth. He was a prophet by calling. Let's walk through Jeremiah's appointment step by step.

A. The Lord revealed His purposes for Jeremiah (4-5). "Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, [5] '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.'"

The call of God works top-down. Jeremiah certainly didn't initiate this conversation. The Lord did. The word of the Lord came to him. Seven times in chapter one we're told that the Lord's word came to Jeremiah (verses 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14). In verses 4-5 the Lord revealed four astounding facts to this unsuspecting man.

One, I knew you before you existed. "Before I formed you in the womb *I knew you*," said Yahweh. When does personhood begin? The so-called pro-choice advocates justify the termination of an unborn "fetus" because it's not yet a person, but merely a glob of tissue. But listen to the Maker's assessment. ***Before*** *I formed you, I* ***knew*** *you.*

The Lord says knew Jeremiah even before he entered his mother's womb. The Hebrew word "knew" (*yada'*) is very personal. It's used in Genesis 4:1 to refer to the intimate relationship between Adam and Eve ("Adam *knew* his wife," NIV "Adam lay with his wife"). Jeremiah, before you were even conceived, I *knew* you, says Yahweh.

Two, I formed you. And the Lord is quite specific, saying, "I formed you in the womb." Deism says that God winds the clock and lets it go. That's not true. The Lord is personally involved in the events of life, including the formation of a child in the mother's womb.

You say, "Okay, so he knew and formed Jeremiah. Can we be sure He did the same with us?"

Yes. No passage describes this beautiful truth any more vividly than Psalm 139:13-16. David writes, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

You are not here by chance, my friend. The Living God fashioned and formed *you* in your mother's womb, as He did with David and Jeremiah.

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[2] R. K. Harrison, p. 47.

Three, I set you apart before you were born. The verb that the Lord uses here means "to set something apart for a particular purpose or use." For instance, in Exodus 20:8 God says in His Word that He set apart the Sabbath day so that it would be treated differently than the other six days. In other words, He gave the seventh day a holy purpose.

That too is what He did for Jeremiah. Before you ever took your first breath, Jeremiah, I *consecrated* you. That's the ESV. The NIV, I *set you apart.* For what? For what purpose?

Four, I selected you to be a prophet. A spokesman for God. A preacher. And more specifically, "a prophet to the nations." Now that must have grabbed Jeremiah's attention! To the nations? I'm just a small-town boy from the village of Anathoth, certainly no metropolitan man. I don't even have a passport, Lord!

Not surprisingly Jeremiah responded just like most of us would have responded. Notice verse 6, "Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.'" The NIV says, "I am only a child."

You say, "Well, that sounds like a legitimate point. Why would the Lord pick a little boy for this assignment?"

For starters, Jeremiah was not a little boy. The Hebrew word for child (*na'ar*) has a broader range than our English word. Elsewhere it refers to infants (Ex. 2:6; 1 Sam. 4:21) and to young men (Gen. 14:24). Most commentators feel that Jeremiah was in his late teens or early twenties.[3]

You may recall that Solomon offered a similar objection in 1 Kings 3:7, "You have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child." Solomon wasn't a little boy either.

But Jeremiah's point is still valid, at least from his perspective. "Lord, I'm no public speaker, and I for sure don't have the experience. I've never been a prophet before, nor did I grow up with one. Why in the world would people listen to a young, whipper-snapper like me?"

Jeremiah is not alone, is he? This is often the response people give when they first learn of the Lord's call. I sure did. When I was eighteen and my pastor told me that he thought that God was calling me to be a pastor, I told him essentially, "I respect you, pastor, but I think you've missed it this time. The aptitude tests all say I'm supposed to be a doctor. I can't see myself as a pastor."

About a year later I changed my major to pre-seminary Bible and eight later I became the pastor of Wheelersburg Baptist Church.

The Lord knows how to convince His servants that His purpose for them is good. He did with Jeremiah. Let's watch what the Lord did next with this man in His call.

B. The Lord addressed Jeremiah's objection (6-8). Notice verses 7-8, "But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. [8] Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,' declares the LORD."

Did you ever notice how often we hear the command "Do not be afraid" in the Bible? Abraham heard it (Gen. 15:1), as did Moses (Num. 21:34; Dt. 3:2), and Daniel (Dan. 10:12, 19), and Mary (Luke 1:30), and Simon (Luke 5:10), and Paul (Acts 27:24). Fear is common to man. We all battle fear.

Harrison is right when he shares, "Fear is one of the most paralyzing human emotions, and can only be dispelled fully by the love of Christ."[4] That's what the apostle

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[3] Observation by Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

[4] R. K. Harrison, p. 50.

John verifies in 1 John 4:18. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

How did the Lord help Jeremiah overcome his fear? I'm intrigued by what the Lord *didn't* say to doubting Jeremiah. He didn't give him the kind of pep talk self-esteem advocates promote, "Oh, Jeremiah, you can do it, but you need to believe in yourself. You may be young, but you've got the potential. You can do anything you want in life. You are special! So say it with me, 'I can do it. I can do it. I can do it.'"

Frankly, he *didn't* have what it would take to fulfill this calling. Not within himself. But that's the point in Jeremiah's call. And ours. As the Lord's response made quite clear, "I'm not calling you because *you* can do it. You can't. *But I am with you*, said the Lord to Jeremiah. As He says to us. That's all you need to know.

There's an important lesson here for us, beloved. Let's not miss it. *God doesn't choose His servants based on their adequacy.* Rather, *God chooses His servants based on His sufficiency.*

Let that truth sink in, beloved, for there are two very common and equally dangerous responses to the Lord's calling. The first is to say, "Okay, Lord. You want me to do that ministry. I'm up for the challenge. I feel adequate. I can do it." *Self-belief* is obviously unacceptable. But so is another response. *Unbelief.* "I know You've chosen me for this ministry, Lord, but You've made a mistake. I'm inadequate. I can't do it. Find someone else."

When it comes to responding to God's call, self-belief *and* unbelief most go. They're unacceptable. What God is interested in hearing from us is this. "Lord, in myself I feel so inadequate for this assignment, but if You want me to do it, then I will do it because You are my sufficiency. If You are with me, I can do everything that You want me to do. I can be a faithful pastor, husband, dad, friend, whatever You want. And I can do it because my sufficiency comes, not from my aptitude, but from Yours."

I love how Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

My friend, perhaps you are on the sidelines right now, as far as God's calling goes. You know the Lord has given you a ministry to fulfill, but it's not happening. I have good news for you. Fix your gaze upon the cross. What do you see there? You see the One who died, not for sufficient people, but for sinners. Jesus Christ took upon Himself your blunders and mine and He paid the penalty for them. And on that cross God transferred the merit of His Son's accomplishments to your account and mine, if we believe in Him.

This is gospel reality, beloved. In Christ God makes us sufficient for all that He calls us to do in life. Has He called you to be a parent? Then in Christ you can be the parent He wants you to be. Has He appointed you to represent Him at your job? Then represent Him well, for in Christ you are up to the task. Whatever it is, let's get rid of our self-belief and unbelief and get back into the game!

You say, "But it's going to take more than a pep talk to make that happen."

You're right. We need more than inspiring words, and the Lord knows it. Which is why He did what He did next with Jeremiah in verses 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. [10] 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.'"

Do you see what just happened?

C. The Lord gave Jeremiah what he needed to fulfill his calling (9-10). "The Lord touched my mouth," says Jeremiah. How appropriate! Jeremiah was concerned that he couldn't speak very well and that he wouldn't know what to say. So the Lord

removed that problem by touching his mouth and putting His own words into that mouth. He gave Jeremiah exactly what he needed so he could do what He was calling him to do.

That's the way God works. When He calls, He enables. When He appoints, He equips. That's not just true for Jeremiah either. That's true for us in five ways. Let's consider five parallels between Jeremiah and us.

1. In Christ, we too have been ***called****.* We see this same word "call" again and again in the New Testament. It sums up our identity according to Ephesians 4:4. "There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were *called* to one hope when you were *called*." If we are in God's family, this is the reason. It's because He *called* us.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers of this reality in 1 Corinthians 1:26. "Brothers, think of what you were when you were *called*. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

Indeed, the concept of *calling* defines what a Christian is according to Romans 8:28. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, *who have been called* according to his purpose." If we are in Christ, it's because we have received a divine calling.

Which raises a question. To what were we called? The New Testament writers identify several things, starting with this one.

2. We were ***called to salvation****.* This is Peter's point in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him *who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*." Paul explains it this way in Romans 8:30, "And those he predestined, he also *called*; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

Our calling begins with salvation. It doesn't end there. The Bible makes it clear that like Jeremiah, we're called to something else.

3. We were ***called to holy living and service****.* Listen to how Paul begins his letter to the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and *called to be holy*." To put it another way, we are "called to be saints," says Romans 1:7. We are "called to a holy life," according to 2 Timothy 1:9.

If that's our calling, and it is, then we have a responsibility. What is it? Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:1, "I urge you to *live a life worthy of the calling* you have received." In other words, if we are called to be holy, then we need to live holy lives, that is, we choose to live lives that are set apart to God for His purposes.

For Jeremiah, that meant being a prophet. That was his calling. God set him apart to serve Him as a preacher to the nations, starting with Judah and beyond. And the Lord has called you and me to serve Him as well. Our lives are not our own, but His. He called us, He saved us, so we could live for His purposes.

Is that happening? Let's be honest. Is that even how we think about our lives, and our children's lives? Do we see ourselves as *His* servants who exist to fulfill *His* agenda? Far too often, I say *yes* but I don't live that way.

I recall when our oldest daughter, Julie, was facing the decision about what was next after college. I'll be honest. As a dad I found myself thinking about income levels and fringe benefits and job security and a location close to home. Are those the kind of issues that matter most if I'm really serious about my daughter living in light of her calling? They are not. What matters most, and what should matter most to me and to you when we think about our lives and our children's lives is this. *How does the Lord want me to serve Him?*

If Jeremiah had been your child, how would you have responded when he told you this? "Dad and mom, the Lord has just called me to serve Him as a prophet. No, He didn't tell me how money this job would generate, but He did tell me that people are not going to appreciate the message He wants me to give them." Would you have

encouraged your son to follow God's calling? Would you have tried to talk him out of it? Of course, that's a moot question. You are not Jeremiah's father or mother. So a better question would be this. Are you encouraging those precious sons and daughters the Lord has entrusted to you to follow *His* calling?

You see, this is where the rub occurs. Teaching our children to pay their bills? That matters. Encouraging them to be responsible citizens. Fine. Expressing your desire to have the grandkids close by. I get it. But this trumps everything. What is the Lord's purpose for our children's lives?

What I'm about to say next is just my opinion. I could be wrong, but from my perspective there are two pressure points that prevent young people from pursuing the ministries the Lord has designed for them. The biggest pressure point? The lure of the world. The second? Parental influence. I'm so grateful for parents (and grandparents) that encouraged me to pursue God's purpose for my life.

Let's be clear about something. God's calling is not easy. "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," says 2 Timothy 3:12. This is the very point that God addressed next with Jeremiah.

4. We were ***called to suffer***. Suffering isn't optional. We're appointed to it. In Jeremiah's case, the Lord didn't pull any punches but told him right up front what to expect. Look back at verse 10 where God told Jeremiah that his ministry was going to have a twofold effect. It would be both destructive and constructive, with the clear emphasis on *destructive*.

The Lord used four verbs in verse 10 to emphasize the first element (the NIV says, "I appoint you to *uproot* and *tear down*, to *destroy* and *overthrow*"), while only two verbs pointing to the second element ("to *build* and to *plant*").[5]

Would you have accepted this call? You say, "I'm too weak." I understand that. So am I. So why then did Jeremiah accept it? Because the Lord took care of that objection. How? This brings us to the fifth parallel.

5. We were ***called to experience the power of God in our weakness***. The Lord says in verse 10, "I have set you this day…" to do all that I have chosen for you to do. There's the key. He provides the power. Isn't that what the Lord told Paul? After pleading with the Lord regarding his thorn in the flesh, Paul heard these words in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This is where the Lord's call begins. The Lord *appoints* His servant. I love what He did next with Jeremiah and am grateful He does it with us too.

II. The Lord assures His servant (11-16).

I can imagine that Jeremiah's head must been spinning at this point. "Today I appoint you over the nations," yes, that's what he heard. Graciously the Lord gave him more than words, for in the next scene He gave him two object lessons to fill his heart with assurance. First, the branch of an almond tree, and second, a tilting boiling pot.

When you first see these object lessons you might think, "That seems like a strange way to give assurance to a struggling prophet." But in reality, these illustrations were indeed quite meaningful to Jeremiah.

Think of it this way. If the Lord called you this morning to be a prophet and then this evening sent you two visions, in the first you saw a bald eagle, and in the second a bell with a crack in it, you'd likely conclude, "That's interesting. The Lord must want to use me right here in my home country, the United States of America." You'd draw that conclusion since the bald eagle and the liberty bell are meaningful emblems in our day.

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[5] Feinberg, p. 384.

So it was with an almond branch and a boiling pot in Jeremiah's day. They meant something to Jeremiah. Let's consider the meanings one at a time.

A. He gave Jeremiah an object lesson: an almond tree branch (11-12). In 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.'"

After a little research, I discovered that the almond tree was a special variety in Judah. It was known as the "awake tree" because it was the first tree to bud and bear fruit each year. In late January, while the other trees were still dormant, the almond tree would burst into bloom. As one commentary points out, "Jeremiah's vision of the 'awake tree' reminded him that God was awake and watching over His word to make sure it came to pass."[6]

And that's the very point the Lord emphasized in verse 12, "Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.'" There's actually a play on words here. The Hebrew word for "watching" sounds like the Hebrew for "almond tree." Do you see what the Lord is doing? He knows that tough times are coming for Jeremiah, so He's branding a motivational picture into the prophet's brain, a picture that would serve Jeremiah well in two ways.

First, it would be a lifelong reminder of His watchful eye. "You'll never be alone, Jeremiah. You will feel alone at times, especially when your countrymen reject you, but you can be sure that I'll be watching."

Second, it would be a lifelong reminder of His powerful Word. "I won't just be watching," my servant, "but watching to *see that my word is fulfilled."*

It reminds me of what the Lord told the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 55:10-11. It's a different metaphor but the same truth. He said, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

The point? All I'm asking you to do Jeremiah is to give them My word. Leave the results up to Me. You can be sure that the results will come.

What kind of results? That's the next illustration.

B. He gave Jeremiah an object lesson: a boiling pot (13-16). Notice verse 13, "The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, 'What do you see?' And I said, 'I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.'"

It's not hard to figure this one out. If someone tips a boiling pot into your lap, what happens? You get burned. It's coming, Jeremiah. My people are about to get burned. Judgment is coming.

From where? Jeremiah says that the pot is tilting away from the north, which indicates it's going to spill its blistering contents towards the south. And lest there be any misunderstanding about this object lesson, the Lord Himself spells out the interpretation. In the following verses He spells out *what* was coming and *why* it was coming.

1. He revealed what was coming (14-15). "Then the LORD said to me, 'Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. 15 For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the LORD, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.'"

In Jeremiah's day, Judah was situated right in the middle of three super-powers who were jockeying for position. There was Egypt to the south, Assyria to the north, and

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[6]Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:1131).

Babylon to the east. In fact, King Ashurbanipal, the last great ruler of Assyria, died about the year of Jeremiah's call, and in the next two decades the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians and the Egyptians to take control of the Middle East.

Do you see it, Jeremiah? The boiling pot is tilting from the north and the day is coming when it's going to scald Judah into submission. That day came in Jeremiah's fortieth year of ministry (586 BC) when the Babylonians burned Jerusalem to the ground.

And lest you're thinking, "But Babylon is situated east of Judah, not north, isn't it?" Yes, it is. But there's a desert between Babylon and Judah which means in order to attack Judah, Babylon had to follow the fertile crescent and invade from the north. Which they did, just like the Lord told Jeremiah they would.

But in addition to *what*, the Lord also revealed *why.*

2. He revealed why it was coming (16). He said in 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."

That's why the pot is tilting your way, Jeremiah. My people have defamed Me. They've forsaken Me and chosen to worship other gods, false gods of their own making. That's what I'm going to do, and why I'm going to do it. You can be sure of it.

And from that day forward, Jeremiah was sure of it. And he preached this message clearly, because he knew God had called him to do so.

Oh dear friends, the Lord is so gracious. First, He appoints, then He assures. He uses His Word to empower the servants He calls, and that includes you and me.

When God called me into the ministry, He didn't give me a vision with an almond branch and boiling pot. He gave me two passages of Scripture to fortify my soul. I can't tell you how many times over the years I've recited Psalm 16:8 and Colossians 1:28-29.

"I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved." Put me first, Brad, in every situation. I'll be with you and I'll fortify you."

"Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete and mature in Christ." That's your assignment. Preach, warn, teach, present. "Unto which I labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." You choose to do my work, Brad, and I'll give you everything you need to accomplish it.

This side of the completed canon, this is how He assures His new covenant ministers. Through His Word. The Lord's call involves one more God-initiated element. The Lord appoints His servant, assures His servant, and *assigns* His servant.

III. The Lord assigns His servant (17-19).

Jeremiah's name means "The Lord throws." That pretty much sums up how the young prophet must have felt that day in 626 BC. The Lord threw quite an assignment his way, and lest there be any confusion, the Lord clarified the details of the assignment in the third element of his call.

A. He told him what to do (17). Notice God's instructions to Jeremiah in verse 17, 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."

Do you remember Jeremiah's initial objection? "Ah, Lord, I don't know how to speak." Now he learns that he won't need great oratorical skills for this ministry assignment.

He learns that his assignment isn't to bring the people back to the Lord, although he will call them to do so again and again. No, his task is to announce that his people have

passed the point of no return and that judgment is coming. Eloquence is not needed, just a tender heart, faithfulness, and a ton of perseverance.[7]

"Get on your feet, Jeremiah, and tell the people whatever I tell you to tell them."

Talk about a difficult assignment! The Lord gave Jeremiah the task of being a preacher of judgment. Think of it in comparison with the other prophets. As Feinberg observes, "Isaiah speaks of the salvation of the Lord, Ezekiel of the glory of the Lord, and Daniel of the kingdom of the Lord, so Jeremiah incessantly proclaims the Lord's judgment."[8]

The next time you find yourself thinking, "I don't like my ministry. I want another one," ask yourself, "What would Jeremiah say?" He would gently (or not so gently but with tears in his eyes) remind you, "My friend, we don't choose our assignments. He does. And you'll never regret doing what He said to do."

Jeremiah did what he did because the Lord told him what to do. But there's more.

B. He told him what to be (18). In 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."

Don't miss this. The day the Lord called Jeremiah into the ministry, He made Jeremiah into something he wasn't before. A fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls. And He did it so Jeremiah could do something he had never done before (stand for God against kings and officials and even priests, including his own peers and family) and could never do in his own strength. And this is exactly what He does for us as well.

He makes us into something that we weren't before. He does this so that we can do things we've never done before, all for His glory. That's what the cross is all about. When we put our faith in Christ and His cross, we become something new, so we can do something new, all for the glory of Him who called us into His service.

C. He told him what to expect (19). In verse 19 He says, "They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."

And that's exactly what happened. For the next four decades, Jeremiah preached to his wayward countrymen, and they fought against him, and God stood with him again and again and again. And then he died.

Some might say Jeremiah wasted his life, for he forfeited the comforts and applause of this world to fulfill his calling and died a lonely man. But he didn't waste his life. And he didn't just die. He died and then entered into the presence of the One who called him to the ministry, and he heard these words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." And in that moment, there was absolutely no question in Jeremiah's mind that it was worth it all!

Make It Personal: Am I living in light of God's call? For some, it's His call for salvation that needs to be heeded. Have you responded to the invitation of God and received His Son as your Savior and Lord? If not, what are you waiting for?

For others in this room, it's His call for holy living, and for service, and even for suffering. Are we living in obedience to the call of God in our lives?

Song of Response: #379 *"Take My Life and Let It Be"* (all six verses)

This evening: Preachers in Training – 1 Thessalonians

2:15-16	Douglas Goncalves
2:17-20	Chris Bailey
3:1-3	John Gowdy

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[7] As Charles Feinberg explains, "What God required for Jeremiah's ministry, which was to be so sad and denunciatory, was a tender heart able to sympathize with the condemned." Charles Feinberg, p. 383.

[8] Charles Feinberg, p. 386.