

## “God’s Sonogram”

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Texts: Jeremiah 1:4-19**

**Prayer:** Sovereign Lord, Your Word has the power to tear down and to heal, to divide and to make whole. We ask this morning through the work of the Holy Spirit that You would tear down any idolatry in our lives and divide us from anything that keeps us from hearing Your call. Heal our wounds and make us whole where we are weak and broken. We praise You for You are the God who is with us always. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

We received this calendar in the office this past week because of this month’s sanctity of life emphasis. I’ve never seen anything quite like it. In it are pictures of infants paired with the 3D sonograms of when they were in their mother’s womb. Before, whenever I’ve seen these type of sonogram pictures of babies I’ve thought that they’ve looked intriguing, but pretty much the same - kind of hard to tell who’s who. But when you have a number of them together along with the infant’s pictures, you can clearly identify the unique features of each child. Small glimpses of what the growing child will look like and become. Indeed, 3D sonogram pictures are quite advanced and a really incredible technology to have available. Yet no matter how advanced our ultrasound technology becomes, there are many things about the developing child that only God sees and knows.

Unfortunately for Jeremiah’s parents the advanced ultrasound technology of our day was not available to them. However, our passage today which tells of God’s call of Jeremiah reveals much more than even the most advanced of sonograms ever could. The Lord said to Jeremiah “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.” Even before he was conceived, God had a special purpose in mind for Jeremiah.

This morning I would like for us to consider the purpose God had for Jeremiah’s life and how God has issued a similar call to all of us who are followers of Christ. Jeremiah’s call can be summed up as “a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah lived during a pivotal time in the history of Israel. Israel had been divided into two kingdoms. Jeremiah was called to urge Judah, the southern kingdom, to turn from their sinful ways and to worship God wholeheartedly so that God would relent in His punishment towards them.

Jeremiah shares God’s message faithfully, going before the kings, the priests and the people. Yet they disregard the warning of God through Jeremiah, closing their eyes and ears to the truth of the situation. After Jeremiah’s appeals have gone unheeded the certainty of Judah’s destruction and the siege of Jerusalem is sure. And so Jeremiah is

called to weep for the people and to mourn for the destruction of the places they treasured so deeply. Jeremiah lives to see the fulfillment of the messages God gave him as he saw the utter ruin of Judah. God also gave him messages that condemned the nations that contributed to Judah's downfall because of their own idolatry.

Thus Jeremiah fulfills his role as a prophet to the nations and God remains true to His Word that He gave His people in Deuteronomy: His elect would be cursed by exile for their unfaithfulness but will be restored at a later time with the hope of a new covenant-which was fulfilled through Jesus Christ, David's "righteous Branch" (Jeremiah 23:5).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to his pivotal role as a prophet to the nations there is another very powerful legacy that Jeremiah leaves behind: the faithfulness and obedience in which he lives out his call. Jeremiah had many difficult experiences as a prophet of God. He began with feelings of inexperience and inadequacy. He experienced utter rejection by all those with whom he sought to share God's Word. Consistently and passionately Jeremiah urged the people to act in order to avoid their own destruction but nobody moved. He was called to be God's spokesperson, but nobody listened. He never attained material success and underwent severe deprivation in order to deliver his prophecies. He was thrown into prison (chapter 37) and into a cistern (chapter 38), and was taken into Egypt against his will (chapter 43).<sup>2</sup> No wonder Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet.

Yet through all these tears Jeremiah remains faithful and obedient to God. He might not look successful in the world's eyes, yet in God's eyes he was one of the most successful people in history. Despite great opposition and personal sacrifice, Jeremiah was obedient to his calling. He courageously and faithfully proclaimed God's Word in the midst of difficult circumstances.

The call that God placed on Jeremiah's life is not one that I envy. The ministry that God gave to one of my college friends when he spent a summer serving with a missions organization in Fiji - that might have tempted me to break the tenth commandment of do not covet, but the call given to Jeremiah certainly does not. While we may not envy Jeremiah's call, we are called to emulate it.

There are certain elements of the call that God gave to Jeremiah that all followers of Christ must share. While we live in a different time and place, we too are called to speak God's Word to the nations. Jeremiah was sent to five different kings to share God's message and he wrote a song of lament for his exiled nation which is Lamentations in our Bible.

We may or may not be called to stand in courts of great political leaders or to write national songs of lament for our country, but Jesus says to us all, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), and "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In the day of Jeremiah only the prophets were given the special task of receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking God's Word to the nations. Yet we live in the days that follow Christ's

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<sup>1</sup> p.194 *How to read the bible for all it is worth*, Fee and Stewart (Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Life Application Bible, Introduction to Jeremiah (Tyndale House and Zondervan, 2005).

ascension. As the prophet Joel foretold and Apostle Peter recalled in Acts, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-32).

In our days, everyone who is a disciple of Jesus has been given the Holy Spirit and is appointed to take God’s Word to the nations. This might look different for each of us. For some this may mean serving on our Missionary Support Team. For others it may mean stepping out in faith to go on a short term mission trip. It may mean learning more about God’s work in specific countries and praying for the believers who labor there. It may mean sharing God’s Word with those from other nations that God has brought to our nation. For others it may mean a radical reorientation of where you thought you would live and where you would work. One of the things that I love about the Perspectives class that we have been talking about over the last month is that its curriculum is designed to inspire and equip everyday believers with the knowledge they need to take God’s Word to the nations. It also provides the context for you to discern what this would look like in your own life.

Like Jeremiah, God appointed us, even before we were conceived, to take His Word to the nations. Like Jeremiah we are also called to obedience and faithfulness through difficult and trying times. While this is a critical message for all of us, I think it is particularly apt for the church officers we will be ordaining and installing today. God has clearly called you to be his servants and spokespersons in this time and place. The vows you will take today set you on the track of a very high calling. And while you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to equip you for ministry, I don’t want you to begin your time of service with the delusion that it will be easy or that the response that others will have to God’s work through you will be the response you hoped for. There may be times when you feel like your pleas to heed God’s Word and to serve him faithfully go ignored. It is unlikely that you will attain material reward for your labors. Hopefully you will not be thrown into anything as Jeremiah was, but there will likely be times when you feel that you are in waters that threaten to go over your head. But in those times, God promises the same things to you as he did to Jeremiah. God is most certainly with you and you can count on Him to be your rescuer. After Jesus commanded his disciples “to go and make disciple of all nations,” He concluded with “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). We are encouraged along with the Thessalonians by these words of Scripture, “the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3). These are the best assurances you could have as you respond to God’s call.

When Jesus was here on earth he made known to all of His followers that the road ahead of them would not be easy. “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done’” (Matthew 16:24-27).

The Apostle Paul was a man well acquainted with the suffering that came with obedience to his call, yet he remained faithful because he knew that the goal and the One who had sent him are worth it. He wrote, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Knowing Christ was Paul’s supreme goal through all things. He declares, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10).

Paul’s suffering for the gospel of Christ was great, but even greater was the power of God at work through him. And greater still is the eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2 Cor. 4:16-18). These are incredible words of encouragement for all who labor in Christ.

My charge to our officers and to all those who would seek to follow Christ with faithful obedience are the words that Paul gave to Timothy during his final days in prison: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:1-8).

As we follow in the footsteps of Jeremiah, may we be found faithful in sharing God’s Word to the nations.