

The Chosen One (Jeremiah 1:1-19)

Big Idea: God chose Jeremiah to speak his message courageously and strengthens him for the task.

Sermon Aim: To introduce the book of Jeremiah and to encourage Christians to speak God's gospel message with courage and dependence on him.

Bible Readings: Jeremiah 1:1-19 and Acts 4:1-31

Introduction

It's my first night on the job.
I'm 18 and I'm a waiter at the Penrith Panther's Leagues Club.
I've never been a waiter before.
I have a friendly smile...
But absolutely ZERO experience.
And here I am working at a wedding reception.

To say that I'm feeling nervous is an understatement.
We get through the main meals with no problems.
Now I'm serving after dinner drinks.
And that's when everything goes wrong.
One table orders a bottle of red wine.
I balance the bottle on my tray with 8 wine glasses.
I reach the table.
I begin placing the glasses down.
And the weight on the tray shifts.
The bottle wobbles...
Then it begins to tip...
And then it falls...
All over the floor!
Let's just say that my table was a little afraid of me for the rest of the night.
But that was my first night on the job.

This morning we begin our sermon series on the book of Jeremiah.
In the first chapter, God gives Jeremiah a job.
It's a big job. A daunting job. An important job.
This job will have a big impact on Jeremiah's life.
But not only on his life.
This job will also have a monumental impact on his nation and on the entire world.

Jeremiah and the History of God's People (1-3)

If we want to understand the book of Jeremiah, we have to understand Jeremiah and the history of God's people.

We must get our heads around where Jeremiah fits into the Bible's story.
And that is what the book does right in the first few verses. Look at verse 1...

¹ *The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.* ² *The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah,* ³ *and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king*

of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

These verses mention THREE KINGS: Josiah. Jehoiakim. And Zedekiah.

Jeremiah lived throughout their reigns.

If you've been at church for a while, you are probably familiar with some of the kings.

There's king David- famous slayer of Goliath.

King Solomon- wealthy and wise with many wives.

But after that, your knowledge of Judah's kings may be a little hazy.

But to put it simply: Most of the kings are A BAD BUNCH.

They are basically evil.

They ignore God's word and lead his people into sin.

There are a couple of exceptions.

Josiah was a good king.

He reigned for 31 years

He righted the wrongs of his predecessors.

But Josiah is an anomaly.

He is a godly exception to the wicked norm.

But he died in 609 BC.

And then his sons, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah...

They follow the evil pattern of their ancestors.

The history of God's people is like a train speeding down the tracks towards a broken bridge.

Josiah manages to hit the brakes.

He slows the train down.

But then his sons come.

They speed it back up.

They reverse everything their father had done.

And so, the people of Judah are back on the deadly track.

The train is thundering down the line.

Getting faster and faster...

And closer and closer to that broken bridge.

Verse 3 tells us that under these kings, the people are heading towards exile.

Disaster is coming.

God's judgment is just around the bend.

This is the situation of God's people.

During this situation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is Appointed by God (4-10)

Jeremiah is appointed by God. Look at verse 4...

⁴ *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 set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”*

God has CHOSEN Jeremiah.

Notice in these verse that God had picked Jeremiah even before he was born.

God had set his eyes on Jeremiah even before his conception in the womb.

God had set Jeremiah apart.

God had singled him out.

God had chosen Jeremiah to do a job.

It's a job that he was literally born to do.

Jeremiah is appointed by God to be a PROPHET.

It is worth pausing here and asking the question: What is a prophet?

Being a prophet was a big job.

Jeremiah knows this. That's why he tries to wriggle out of it in verse 6.

What is a prophet? A prophet is someone who speaks for God.

When God had something to say to the people, he spoke through a prophet.

That's what we see in verse 7...

⁷ *But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.*

As a prophet, Jeremiah must go where God tells him to go.

And he must say whatever God tells him to say.

When the prophet speaks, it is the same as God speaking.

That's what the vision of verse 9 is all about.

God reaches out his hand and touches Jeremiah's mouth.

God puts his words into Jeremiah's mouth.

Jeremiah's words are now God's words.

Notice in verse 10, the words that Jeremiah will speak are POWERFUL WORDS.

Verse 10...

¹⁰ *See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”*

Jeremiah is not merely a fortune teller.

He is not just predicting the future.

Or saying what is going to happen.

Look closely at what God says in this verse.

He says “Today I appoint YOU over nations and kingdoms...”

Jeremiah isn't just saying what is going to happen.

Jeremiah is making it happen.

Jeremiah will uproot nations.

His words will tear down kingdoms.

They will destroy and overthrow.

But they will also create.

When Jeremiah speaks, he will build and plant.

We love the feeling of power, don't we?
 There is something invigorating about it.
 You feel it when you come home after a shopping trip to Bunnings.
 You've got your chain saw. Your power drill. Your lawn edger.
 And you are just brimming with power.
 Power to tear down branches.
 Power to demolish bushes with ease.
 Power to destroy and also the power to build.
 Power to build a cubby house.
 Power to construct a new veranda.
 Power to plant a new garden bed.

Jeremiah's words will be powerful words.
 Words that will shake the world.
 Why?
 Because they are God's words.
 Jeremiah is now a prophet.
 When he speaks, God speaks.
 This means that Jeremiah will speak with power.

Jeremiah is Strengthened by God (11-19)

Jeremiah has been appointed by God.
 In verses 11 to 19, Jeremiah is STRENGTHENED by God.
 Jeremiah will need courage to speak God's word.
 Because it's hard word.
 It's a message of judgement!
 Look at verse 13...

¹³ *The word of the Lord came to me again: "What do you see?"*

"I see a pot that is boiling," I answered. "It is tilting toward us from the north."

¹⁴ *The Lord said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. ¹⁵ I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the Lord.*

*"Their kings will come and set up their thrones
 in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem;
 they will come against all her surrounding walls
 and against all the towns of Judah.*

¹⁶ *I will pronounce my judgments on my people
 because of their wickedness in forsaking me,
 in burning incense to other gods
 and in worshiping what their hands have made.*

This is NOT a message of therapeutic deism.
 This is not a feel-good, self-esteem boost.
 In verse 16, God says that his people are wicked.
 They have forsaken him.

Deserted him.
 Walked out on him.
 They have shackled up with idols and other gods.
 They are thoroughly wicked.
 They will face judgement.

Verse 13, God will call a kingdom from the north.
 He will muster up a foreign army.
 He will summon this boiling pot.
 And it will pour its burning contents all over the land.

This is a hard word.
 It's a hard message.
 And it will not be well received.
 Look at verse 19. Those who hear Jeremiah's message will fight against him.
 The kings.
 The officials.
 The priests.
 The people of Judah.
 EVERYONE will be against Jeremiah because of this hard word.
 We can see why Jeremiah needs courage.
 He needs all the strength he can get!
 And that's exactly what God gives him.

The first way God strengthens Jeremiah is in verse 11.
 God shows him an almond tree.
 It's a common plant in Judah.
 Like a gum tree for us.
 Almond trees were everywhere.
 God uses this almond tree to strengthen Jeremiah. To encourage him.
 Verse 11...

¹¹ *The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?"*
"I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied.

¹² *The Lord said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."*

I like a good dad joke.
 Dad jokes are usually a play on words.
 Here is one of my favourites...
 "What do you call a cow with no legs? Ground beef!"
 "What do you call a cow with three legs? Lean beef!"

God is a heavenly father, so it's no surprise that he also likes a bit of a dad joke.
 That's what we have here in these verses. A pun. A play on words.
 In Hebrew, the word for 'almond' is **sAqed**.
 And the word for 'watching' is **sOqed**.

God uses this play on words to strengthen Jeremiah.
 Every time Jeremiah sees an almond tree, he can remember that God is watching.
 That God is present. That he is with Jeremiah.
 God is eagerly at work when Jeremiah speaks.
 God is there making his words come true.
 The almond tree is a reminder to Jeremiah that God is with him in power.

The second way God strengthens Jeremiah is in verse 17...

¹⁷ “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. ¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land.

In verse 17 God tells Jeremiah to get himself ready.
 To harden up.
 To prepare for the job ahead.
 But look at verse 18.
 Look at what God does.
 God makes Jeremiah like a fortified wall around a city.
 Like an iron pillar and bronze wall.
 God doesn't leave Jeremiah to his own devices.
 Jeremiah needs to harden himself up and at the same time God does it for him.
 God makes him resilient.
 God makes him strong so that he can stand against opposition.

Another job I had was working in a school art department.
 Students would make sculptures out of clay.
 I saw some amazing sculptures.
 Delicately crafted animals. Smoothly finished plates and cups.
 I also saw some hilariously bad sculptures.
 Deformed shapes that are supposed to resemble an octopus.
 Sometimes I had no idea what they were at all.
 But these clay sculptures all had one thing in common.
 They were soft.
 They were weak and fragile.
 I could squash them all with my hands.

That is why my job was to put them in the kiln.
 These soft, squishy sculptures would be fired.
 Their softness would be transformed into strength.
 At the end of the process, they became rock solid, tough and hard.

This is what God does for Jeremiah.
 Jeremiah became rock solid in his conviction that he was speaking God's word.
 Jeremiah became strong enough to speak God's hard word.

And to keep speaking even when people hated him for it.
 Even when his fellow Jews verbally abused him.
 Even when they beat him up.
 Even when they threw him in jail and tried to kill him.
 Jeremiah stood strong.

And more than that- look at God's promise in verse 19...

19 They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

What a promise! What an encouragement!
 No matter what happened.
 No matter what people did to him.
 No matter how dark the situation.
 In the end, God would rescue him.

So, Jeremiah begins his first day on the job.
 Appointed by God to be his prophet.
 Chosen to speak the hard word of judgement.
 But strengthened by God to be faithful no matter what.

Jeremiah and Jesus

We will see Jeremiah get into it next week.
 But as we look at Jeremiah's job, can you see how it points to Jesus?
 Can you see how it foreshadows Jesus?
 Like Jeremiah, Jesus was appointed by God.
 Like Jeremiah, he spoke God's hard word.
 He spoke God's message of judgement to the people of Judah.
 Jesus called out their sin.
 Do you remember how they responded?
 They hated him.
 They fought against him.
 Challenging his authority.
 Trying to trap him in his words.
 Conspiring to arrest him.
 Plotting to kill him.
 And eventually, they succeeded.
 Jesus was executed on the cross because of the hard word he spoke.
 But those who hated Jesus did not have the last word.
 Their victory was short lived.
 Just like God promised to rescue Jeremiah...
 God rescued Jesus from the grave.

Jesus Appoints and Strengthens Us

And now the risen Jesus has appointed us to speak.
 And he strengthens us by his Spirit.
 Jeremiah was unique.

He had a very special job.
 It's true that we are not Jeremiah.
 But Jesus has chosen us to speak God's gospel word to the world.
 How amazing it that?!
 What a privilege that Jesus gives this job to US?
 What an honour that WE have been entrusted with the gospel!

Like Jeremiah, we need God's help.
 We need him to give us strength.
 Because the gospel is a hard word to hear.
 It's hard for people to hear that judgement is coming.
 That everyone needs to turn back to God.
 That we all have sinned and need forgiveness.
 The gospel is a hard word to hear.
 And sometimes when people don't like the message, they take it out on the messenger.
 Of course, hostility to God's hard word is nothing new.
 And the level of hostility will vary from time to time and place to place.
 But hostility is increasing in western countries.
 It is becoming more and more daunting to speak God's message in our culture.
 And so we need God's help.
 We need God's strength.
 We need God to harden us up so that we will speak his hard word.

We read in Acts 4 about the early church.
 How the disciples got into some serious trouble for talking about Jesus.
 They were threatened by the Jewish leaders.
 And told to keep quiet or face the consequences.
 How did the disciples respond?
 How did the wider church react?
 It would have been so tempting for them to stop evangelism.
 To downplay mission. To focus only on those inside the church.
 What did they do? They prayed. Acts 4:29...

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

They prayed for courage.
 They prayed for boldness.
 They prayed for strength to speak.
 They knew that the threats against them were formidable.
 And so, they depended on God. And they prayed.

God answers their prayer in verse 31...

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

How GOOD is it to know that we are NOT ALONE!

God is with us every step of the way.

And he strengthens us by his Spirit so that we can speak with courage and boldness.

So like the church in Acts 4, let's pray for God's help.

Let's recognise our dependence on him and ask him to strengthen us.

So that we would speak the gospel with courage...

So that God would work powerfully through us...

So that this hard word would do it's work.

So that God would be glorified and that people would be saved.