

## **Jeremiah 1:4-10 - God's calling on your life – Trinity – Eindhoven (30-01-2022)**

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Maybe you know the name and the story of **Eric Lidell**, he became a famous runner at the 1924 Olympics in Paris. His best event was the 100-meter race. But when he found out that the race was scheduled on the Sunday, he withdrew because of his Christian faith. Instead he ran the 400 meters on a weekday, and he won the gold medal against all odds. Just before that race, someone handed him a piece of paper quoting a verse from Scripture: 'He that honours me, I will honour'.

But the real surprise comes after the Olympics, and that is why I am telling this story. He could have had a successful career as an athlete but instead he went to China as a missionary teacher, following in the footsteps of his parents. He died in February 1945 in a Japanese prison camp in China, 5 months before the end of WW-II.

Why did Eric leave his career as an athlete behind and teach people at the other side of the globe? The answer is simply: because of God's call on his life, because Eric wanted to serve God and be a blessing to others.

### **[Questions]**

Now the problem with this story is that you probably think: I am not Eric Lidell. *I am not interested in a dramatic career change. I am happy as I am.* That is fine. I am not telling this story as a model to follow but only for us to reflect on the question: How is God using me in building his Kingdom? How am I (or we as a church) blessing others? Because that question applies to all of us!

Today we look at the story of Jeremiah's calling with this question in the back of our minds. Our circumstances and lives are very different from Jeremiah's, but we serve the same God who has created us for a purpose and who asks us to follow Him and to bless others in His name.

### **[Text]**

On a particular day in 627 BC the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in a village near Jerusalem where he had grown up in a priestly family.

We can divide this passage (4-10) up in 3 parts:

1. God's choice (4-5)
2. Jeremiah's (& God's) response (6-8)
3. God's commission (9-10)

#### **1. God's choice**

This calling of Jeremiah shows that God is sovereign and that he wants to save his people. 'Before you were born, I consecrated you'. Those are amazing words. *Before you were formed in the womb, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.* It is God who is taking the initiative: he chose Jeremiah, set him apart, appointed him. Again: those are amazing words. God wants his people Israel to return to the covenant with Him and he wants to use Jeremiah from that small village as his messenger.

We are not like Jeremiah. I will say that a few times more in this sermon. In the Bible we see that God calls different people to different tasks under different circumstances. We cannot use Jeremiah's account as a model that applies to everybody. That being said, we are like Jeremiah in the sense that God has created us (Ps. 139: *it was You who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb*) and that God wants us to serve him and dedicate our lives to him.

The consecration of Jeremiah also reminds us today of the consecration (presentation) of Jesus in the Temple. As the firstborn he was consecrated to God and this Jesus would be 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of God's people Israel' (Luke 2). Jeremiah's calling was all about pointing to this Messiah and this salvation.

#### **2. Jeremiah's response & God's response**

Verse 6 is surprising. Imagine that you hear God speaking all this to you (*made you, know you, chose you, appointed you*) and then you say: 'No, can't do it, I am too inexperienced'. That is what Jeremiah is doing. Of course we can understand his response: A prophet to the nations? Who? Me? 'I am only a boy', he says. The word 'boy' in Hebrew could also mean someone without experience or status. 'I do not know how to speak', he continues. The word to *know* here is in sharp contrast with verse 5 where we read that God *knew* Jeremiah before he was formed.

Now God is not dismissing Jeremiah's point, but he is saying: your insecurity is not so relevant. I will send you; I will tell you what to say.

And then God's care for Jeremiah also becomes clear in verse 8: *don't be afraid, I am with you to deliver you*. I have delivered my people so many times in the past. I will do the same for you! Jeremiah must have reminded God often of these words later in life. If you continue to read the story of Jeremiah, you see that it was a life with a lot of suffering and hardship.

This calling of Jeremiah sounds very much like the one of Moses. There are several parallels between the two. When you look at the story in Exodus 3-4 you see that Moses also objected to God's assignment, but God overruled him with his promise of protection.

Moses came up with 5 reasons why someone else should do it:

1. I really can't do it! God: I am with you!
2. I don't have an answer to all questions. God: I will be with you, that is my Name. I will do it.
3. They won't listen to me! God: Didn't I just said that I will do miracles?
4. I can never find the right words! God: I thought I had already said that I will be with you?! I will tell you what to say.
5. Just send someone else! God [annoyed]: I will send Aron along and he will do the talking. Now go & don't forget your staff because you need it. And off he went...

### **3. God's commission**

And then Jeremiah is commissioned for his task: the Lord will put his words in the mouth of the prophet, and he is appointed over nations & kingdoms. Quite overwhelming, I would say.

Note that it is not Jeremiah who is set over nations and kingdoms but the Word of the Lord in his mouth. The effect of his message is described with 6 agricultural metaphors: pluck up, pull down, destroy, overthrown, build and plant. There are 4 negative verbs and the last 2 are words of hope. And these words also describe Jeremiah's challenging ministry: he had the difficult task of announcing that destruction would come if there was no change. But he could also speak words of hope and new beginnings: *I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first* (chapter 33).

### **[Take away]**

We are not Jeremiah. God does not speak to us anymore the same way as he did in the OT. Maybe you say: a calling is only for pastors and missionaries. So what can we take away from this today?

#### **1. First calling is to love God**

We are all called by God and our first call is to be his child. From that follows the call for all of us to serve him. Doesn't matter whether you are young or old, whether you are a teacher, businessperson, engineer, student... Nobody is exempted to be active in God's world. We are all able to share the good news of the Kingdom in what we say and what we do, in a way that fits our character and gifting.

#### **2. Don't focus on obstacles**

Maybe you feel you are an unlikely choice for God. Too young, too old, too insecure, too inexperienced, too settled, too unsettled, or whatever. Then you are in the right place. You are not the only one who has doubts and fears: Moses, Jeremiah, St. Paul and so many others.

God has given each of us gifts and he 'calls' us to use them in a way that glorifies God. Our vocation is the way in which we respond to the gifts God has given us.

God is not only calling missionaries or pastors! There is no distinction between church and society in that sense. In *everything* we do we can serve him, so he is also calling businesspeople, nurses, managers, teachers, car mechanics and lawyers. Tim Keller: Pastors are not that important. When Jesus returns and the Kingdom comes in fullness, pastors are without a job!

For some God's calling is more dramatic (like Jeremiah's), for others it has been a gradual process. Some are called for a very difficult task (Jeremiah again), most of us are called to serve God in our normal circumstances, with 'normal' challenges. Basic question is: have we heard his voice, or have we ignored it? Have we listened to God's call on our lives, or have we put it aside because we see too many obstacles? The Lord says: *Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you.*

### **3. God can do it without us, but he does not want to**

Of course God could have done it without Jeremiah, but he chose to use this prophet to pass on his message of judgement and restoration. Of course he can build his Kingdom without you and me, without Trinity church in Eindhoven but he does not want to do it like that. He has chosen us, you and me, to shine his light in this world, to reach out to the expat community in Eindhoven. He is asking us if we are ready to go where he wants us to go and to speak His words of love, grace, correction, and peace in His Name.

I would like to finish with this parable/story from Nigeria:

One year during the wet season there was a very bad storm. It blew the church's roof off in one small village. When the catholic priest came to inspect the fallen roof, he was sad to see that one of the rafters had fallen in and broken a large statue of Christ. Now the statue had no arms and no legs. The falling rafter had broken these off. The priest was disturbed and decided to get some cement and lime and put new legs and arms back on the statue.

While the priest slept that night, he had a dream. Jesus appeared to him and said: 'Do not put back any arms or legs on the statue, as I do not need them now'.

The priest was amazed and asked: Please Jesus, why do you not need them anymore? Jesus answered: You are my arms & legs now!

Amen