



Rev Alan Johnston

Today we are looking at Jeremiah chapter 1 and verses 4 – 19. Last week we looked at the background of this study we will be doing and if you missed it, it is on our website in two different forms either as a pdf file you can download and open to read or as an mp3 file you can listen to – also available as a podcast through itunes. If however all that to you sounded like gobildy gook you could ask Sandra to print out a sheet for you for next week. I suppose what I am trying to say is that last week's word was an important message as in many ways it will be the key that will help us unlock a lot of what we will be looking at over the next number of weeks, so it might be good if you could get yourself a copy.

We are going to start today looking at verse 4:

⁴The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

One question that I am sure is on many lips this morning is:

1) What exactly is a prophet?

Prophets were people who were chosen to be spokespersons, whom God used to deliver his word. The term “prophet” has several meanings: to “proclaim”, even to “bubble forth” or “pour forth words”. What is generally accepted is that the voice of the prophet is not his own. He is not someone who decides to speak his own mind into various circumstances. They were “called” to speak God's truth to those would listen and more often than not to those who refuse to listen.

Occasionally a prophet is called a “seer” (taken literally, to be a “beholder”). What this actually refers to is the way in which they received the divine message. When they served as messengers, they were conveying the divine word they received—not their own opinions. The Bible would seem to mention in particular 55 people as being prophets, but there were hundreds more. There were both men and women prophets, and we read of at least one non- Jewish or Gentile, Baalam (Numbers 22 – remember the man with the talking donkey). Only a comparatively few prophets wrote books of the Bible.

The prophets of Israel had 3 important tasks:

1. They were divinely appointed moral and ethical preachers and teachers.
2. They told about predictions of future events concerning the nation of Israel and the coming of the Messiah.
3. They warned Israel of the dangers of turning to other gods and worshiping any god often referred to as religious apostasy.

As someone has said we could summarize the role of the prophets as foretelling and forthtelling.

Prophets could, with authority, begin their messages by saying, “Hear the message the Lord has spoken to me.” “Thus saith the Lord!” Or here in Jeremiah’s case

⁴The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

How did they hear God’s voice? How did they know they were speaking out for God? Sometimes God’s word came to them through dreams or visions, other times by directly hearing the voice of the Lord.

The book of Hebrews opens by saying

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1:1). Peter explains that “men moved (lit. “carried along”) by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Pet 1:21).

We believe that the prophetic message was what we call “inspired”, a word that means “God-breathed”. God spoke through the prophets. The prophet was to put it in perhaps a more crude sense, God’s mouthpiece.

It is important for us to realise however that prophets were not philosophers or geniuses, able to - on their own - come up with answers to life’s problems. They depended on God for insight and inspiration. In fact, it is possible that the prophets often didn’t fully understand their messages, the things they were asked to say - especially when what they spoke was intended for future generations.

We often think of prophets as cross, angry preachers; we are often guilty of stereotyping them as harsh proclaimers of gloom and doom. We have a warped image of prophets as raving mad men. Sometimes the prophets spoke through object lessons, similar to children’s addresses; sometimes they sang their messages, accompanied on musical instruments (II Kings 3).

They often taught—we read of the schools of the prophets in the Old Testament. In much the same way as rabbis in the New Testament had their followers so too did the prophets of old. People who wanted to serve God and know His will followed the prophets. They weren’t training to become prophets—the prophets taught the Law of God, not “how to” prophesy.

The prophetic call came only from God, regardless of previous training. It is so important to realise that, as I mentioned last week, in having to say ‘No’ to society, by challenging the nation and in condemning sin, they always held out hope for forgiveness and restoration, to reconcile the nation with God. Every prediction of disaster is a caring exhortation to repentance. The call to prophesy was often conveyed with a miraculous sign or vision from God.

As with the call to the ordained pastoral ministry, there was what we sometimes refer to as an inner conviction and outward evidence which verified the divine call.

2) We are fully known to God before we are born.

⁴The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

“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.”

Just this week I had two different funerals on the same day. The first was for two little still born twin boys.

In this sort of a situation we often say that they never had the chance to live. They were not born in the same way as the children we had up at the front this morning were born. But the bible affirms to us in black and white that regardless of their developmental age they are fully known to God.

Jeremiah has this wonderful word from God who basically says to him, “Before you had the opportunity to open your eyes, or to breathe or to become independent of your mother, I knew you.” No one is an accident and God is in control of a life even before He starts to knit us together in our mother’s womb. This has some massive implications for us. There are however sensitive issues caught up within this and it is not my intention this morning to be in any way insensitive. But I just want to read this article I found recently about Dr. Bernard Nathanson who was the leading abortion doctor in the United States in the 1970’s. He had campaigned vigorously for the legalization of abortion and he himself had performed 60,000 abortions. He even believed his intentions were good and that he was doing a righteous thing by providing a service that guaranteed a woman’s right to control her body. But something changed Dr. Nathanson’s point view. It was a medical breakthrough called the ultrasound, introduced in 1976. This device literally opened a window on foetal development. The first time Dr Nathanson saw an ultrasound in action, he was with a group of residents gathered around a pregnant patient in a darkened examining room watching a demonstration by a technician. The technician applied a conductive gel to the woman’s tummy and then began working a handheld sensor over her small bump. As the screen clarified, Nathanson was amazed. He could see a throbbing heart. When the technician focused closely on the image, Nathanson could see all four chambers of the heart pumping blood. And during the scan Nathanson became convicted. He said that his mind had dropped the word foetus in favour of the word baby. Suddenly, everything he had been learning about the child in the womb since his entry into the medicine snapped into focus. He had known what took place in the womb but somehow seeing it for the first time changed everything. Bernard Nathanson, the leading abortion doctor in America, became convinced that human life existed within the womb from the onset of pregnancy. In an article he wrote for the New England Journal of Medicine he wrote, in abortion “we are taking life.” That foetus is not mere tissue it is human life.

3) What is your excuse?

“Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” ⁷But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD. ⁹Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

“Dwight L. Moody was a poorly educated, unordained, shoe salesman who felt God’s call to preach the gospel. Early one morning he and some friends gathered in a hay field for prayer. His friend Henry Varley said these words: ‘The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.’

Moody later recalled the words spoken by his friend, and realized Varley meant any man! Not someone educated, or brilliant, or anything else. Just a man! Moody determined to be that man. He sought to be fully and wholly committed to Christ, and God did extraordinary things through him. Moody became one of the great evangelists of modern times. He founded a Bible college. He planted the Moody church which still meets in Chicago.” Andrew Murray once said, “God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.” In other words it doesn’t matter if you are too young.

I know of children who have led other children to Christ in the playground! I have heard teenagers speaking to their peers with greater passion and love than anyone else could have because they were young enough to identify with the ones to whom they were speaking. You are never too young to be used by God.

Jeremiah tried to use his age as an excuse not because I genuinely believe that for him his age was an issue, but rather because he was plain scared with what might happen to him if he started doing what God was asking him to do. God gave him a couple of visions then that he explained to Jeremiah by way of proof of the call and the message that Jeremiah had to give. But the whole way through, God is giving Jeremiah assurances that he will be with him.

⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

And then again look at verse 17 on:

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. ¹⁸Today 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. ¹⁹They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

It is never God’s plan to call you, commission you and then once he has told you what to do, He stands back pushes you gently from behind, or in some cases shoves you and waves goodbye as you walk off into battle. When God calls someone, as we thought last week, He equips and then promises to be with you and support you – after all it is His work you are doing, you are His instrument and He wants it to succeed. If God has a plan for your life HE will see it through to completion. But you know, He has a plan for each of our lives. A tailor made plan that is just for you. It is a plan that *you* may not have chosen for yourself but because it is God’s plan for you, it is therefore the very best plan for your life. The problem is many of us are a bit like Jeremiah when we say to God, “not me, I’m too young, or I’m too old or I can’t speak properly, or I am not as clever as so and so, or I have my own dreams or my own plans or - you fill in the space for yourself – These are not reasons, they are not even excuses they are simply seen as disobedience in God’s eyes. Whose looking after your life at the moment? You or God? If you have not yet yielded your life in its entirety to God then you are looking after your own life and in all honesty you should expect nothing from God. But if you have heard God calling you and you have received that call in faith then you have exactly the same assurance Jeremiah had: ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD. Or as Andrew Murray said, “God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.”

Full responsibility – that doesn't just mean in this life – that responsibility stretches into eternity. Jesus said:

⁸"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. ⁹But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.