1. The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah (4Q 2015—Jerem iah)


Quotes

- The call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Whether I hear God’s call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude. Oswald Chambers
- Every day is important for us because it is a day ordained by God. If we are bored with life there is something wrong with our concept of God and His involvement in our daily lives. Even the most dull and tedious days of our lives are ordained by God and ought to be used by us to glorify Him. Jerry Bridges
- Behind every specific call, whether it is to teach or preach or write or encourage or comfort, there is a deeper call that gives shape to the first: the call to give ourselves away—the call to die. Michael Card
- It’s important to understand that at every point of opposition to who we are or to what God has called us to do, we are presented with the options of either conforming and giving in, or standing our ground and becoming stronger in who God has made us to be. Gabriel Wilson
- If you find what you do each day seems to have no link to any higher purpose, you probably want to rethink what you’re doing. Ronald A. Heifetz
- Everyone will be forgotten, nothing we do will make any difference, and all good endeavours, even the best, will come to naught. Unless there is God. If the God of the Bible exists, and there is a True Reality beneath and behind this one, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavour, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever. Timothy Keller

Questions

How do we identify a “call”? To what degree are our own wishes involved? How do we balance a “calling” and individual freedom of choice? When we speak of having a vocation what do we mean? How does Jeremiah’s response help us in understanding God’s will and purpose in our own lives?

Bible summary

Jeremiah 1:1-5 contains Jeremiah’s background and God’s statement that he knew Jeremiah “before I formed you in the womb.” Jeremiah’s response is that he is too young, and doesn’t know how to speak. God promises he will always be with him (Jer. 1:6–19). This is God’s constant assurance to those who follow him, just as Jesus told his disciples (Matt. 28:20). God wanted to give a positive message (Jer. 7:5-7) if his people changed their ways and returned to him. This is the same message God gives through Isaiah (Is. 1:19). God’s merciful attitude is shown to Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26), even though he is guilty.

Comment
The perception of Jeremiah as the “prophet of doom” obscures his real role in trying to help his people despite their deep apostasy and its results. By urging them to accept what God had foretold, they would have avoided many of the problems they had caused for themselves. It’s amazing that having watched the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians that the people of Judah would continue in their sinful state, hostile and rebellious to the true God.

Jeremiah too had seen the northern kingdom fall. He was also to see the last “good” king (Josiah) followed by a succession of “bad” kings who did nothing to stop the moral collapse of the kingdom—in fact their actions hastened this. Jeremiah found himself “out-of-tune” with the policies of the monarchy and the desires of the people—so much so that his life was in danger most of the time. His experience shows us that telling the truth is not always popular. In words ascribed to George Orwell, (probably never used by him but none-the-less true), “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” Certainly Jeremiah was persecuted and imprisoned for being a traitor when he urged submission to the Babylonians, and he ended up dying with the exiles in Egypt, far from the Promised Land.

Unusually Jeremiah is not only a prophet, but the son of a priest (Jer. 1:1). He was active from around 626BC until 587BC, and his prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of five kings (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah). He was betrayed by his brothers, imprisoned by the king, thrown into a cistern, beaten and put in the stocks, threatened with death etc.

This background is very relevant to the subject of this first lesson—Jeremiah’s call. Of course, he surely did not know everything that would result from accepting the call, but the situation was clear even at the time of the call. Maybe that was why Jeremiah was reluctant, saying he didn’t know how to speak (echoing the words of Moses), and that he was too young. But God promises, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.” Jer. 1:6, 7 NIV.

**Ellen White Comments**

Among those who had hoped for a permanent spiritual revival as the result of the reformation under Josiah was Jeremiah, called of God to the prophetic office while still a youth, in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign. A member of the Levitical priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years of preparation he little realized that he had been ordained from birth to be “a prophet unto the nations;” and when the divine call came, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness. “Ah, Lord God!” he exclaimed, “behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.” Jeremiah 1:5, 6.

In the youthful Jeremiah, God saw one who would be true to his trust and who would stand for the right against great opposition. In childhood he had proved faithful; and now he was to endure hardness, as a good soldier of the cross. “Say not, I am a child,” the Lord bade His chosen messenger; “for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee.” {PK 407-8}