

The Word of the Lord in the Words of Jeremiah

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] And so first, we'll talk about Jeremiah's context, and then his consecration, and lastly, his commission as we go through this together. So first, let's begin by looking at Jeremiah's context. In verses 1 to 3, the author Jeremiah himself, he tells us about who he is and the historical period in which he lived.

Verse 1 says, The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. So it tells us that Jeremiah is the one who wrote this book, and that he had a priestly ancestry, and that he's from Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.

It's possible that Jeremiah is descended from Abiathar, who was David's priest but was deposed by Solomon, his successor, and replaced with Zadok the priest.

And then, because Abiathar then went back to his hometown of Anathoth in 1 Kings 2, 26 to 27. So if that's the case, then Jeremiah actually descended from the priesthood of Eli.

And so he belongs to the priesthood, the house of priests that was rejected by God because of their unfaithfulness to God. And so if that's the case, this really shows God's faithfulness and his steadfast love.

[1 : 1 4] It does not punish children for the sins of their parents, but he is able to redeem and to use them again. And there remains to this day a town named Anathoth in the same area where Anathoth was.

It's a Palestinian town in Israel in the West Bank. And in the ancient times, it belonged to the land of Benjamin. It belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

And so by this point, as I mentioned, Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. And the southern kingdom of Judah only included two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, that remained loyal to David and his sons.

And so that's the context in which Jeremiah ministered. And so this book contains the words of Jeremiah, as it says in verse 1, but it's also so much more than that. Right? So that verse 2 continues.

24 times in the book of Jeremiah, the expression, the word of the Lord came to me is used. And the word, referring to the word of the Lord, occurs approximately 200 times in this book alone.

[2 : 2 1] So it's not an exaggeration to say that the word of the Lord is one of the main characters of this book. And the word of God, the word of the Lord, is the divine self-expression, the self-disclosure of God.

And the word of God, even though our words are powerful and we could cause much damage or do much good with what we say, our words can fall short. Right? We can say something and not follow through with it. And we can say, promise something and not keep it.

But with God, that's never the case because whatever he says happens. His word has always substance behind it. It always has power behind it. It is always efficacious.

And so in Genesis 1, God creates the universe by his word. And then he reveals himself by his word. And then it says in Psalm 107.20 that he even saves us by his word.

He sent out his word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction. So the word of God is powerful. It's active. It's a self-expression of God in redemption and salvation.

[3 : 21] And because of the authority of God, the kingship of God, God, he comes with always with decreed force. It never falls to the ground. And that word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.

So while these are truly the words of Jeremiah, they're not merely the words of Jeremiah. It's the record of the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah. The words of the Lord in the words of Jeremiah.

And verse 2 tells us when this word came to Jeremiah. So it's...

The word of the Lord seems to have come over a span of... A period of time to Jeremiah. And the first time, it seems, was 627 B.C., which was the 13th year of King Josiah's reign.

And then it lasted to 586 B.C., which was the year of the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. So these were tumultuous times that Jeremiah ministered. And it was a time when the Assyrian Empire was declining and the Babylonian Empire was rising in the north of Judah and in Israel.

[4 : 39] And during that time, Judah was repeatedly subjected to other nations. And Jeremiah was charged with bringing the message of God's judgment and future restoration during this tumultuous time.

So you're probably wondering at this point, so why does this matter? Why include these biographical details? Who cares? Jeremiah is not around right now.

It's in God's word for a reason. Acts 17, 26 to 27 tells us this. That God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him.

These details about Jeremiah's context teach us that God sovereignly placed Jeremiah in that particular location, at that particular time, to fulfill His salvation purposes.

And that truth would have been of tremendous comfort to Jeremiah because he faced a lot of persecution and suffering and difficulties. And when he's tempted to ask himself, why me?

[5 : 58] Why do I have to be the one to deliver this message of judgment to Israel, to Judah? Why do I have to live in Judah at a time of faithlessness and disobedience rather than in a time of faith and obedience and prosperity?

Why me? And we ask similar questions in our lives, don't we? Why me? Why am I here?

Why now? Why does this have to happen to me now? But this passage teaches us that we serve a sovereign God who is Lord over our lives, Lord over our world, Lord over our history, so that no detail of our life is a mistake or an accident.

God's not caught off guard by the twists and turns of this life, so we can trust Him and persevere in faith. And that's what this truth did for Jeremiah. Why me? Why all this?

Well, God placed you here at this particular time, in this particular place, to fulfill His saving purposes. That's Jeremiah's context.

[7 : 10] Then in verses 4 to 10, we see Jeremiah's consecration. It says in verses 4 to 5, Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

And before you were born, I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. God's saying to Jeremiah, Before you were formed in the womb, I knew you.

Before you came out of the womb, I consecrated you. When God says, I knew you, He doesn't merely mean that, oh, I know who you are. When He says that, it means it's God's knowledge.

It's referring to His electing love, that He chose Jeremiah. That He consecrated Jeremiah for Himself. That's why those two phrases, two words, are used in parallel. And in Amos 3.2, it says, God says to His people, You only have I known among all the families of the earth.

So obviously, when God says that God is the all-knowing God, He's the omniscient God, when God says, You only have I known in all the nations of the earth, He's not saying, Well, I don't really know anything about those nations, but I know who you are.

[8 : 21] That's not what God is saying. God is saying, I know you. I knew you. I chose you as my special possession to have a special and intimate relationship with you. You are my chosen people.

You only have I known among the families of the earth. So when God tells Jeremiah, I knew you before you were formed in the womb, He's saying that I singled you out and chose you for myself even before you were conceived.

And God also says, Before you were born, I consecrated you. And the word consecrate means to set apart for a special purpose. When a couple gets married, they enter into a special exclusive relationship.

They are set apart for each other and commit to knowing each other in a way that no one else can share with them. That's what it means to be consecrated.

To Jeremiah is consecrated to the Lord, set apart specially for him as his sole special possession to belong to him and to no one else. It's an honor to be consecrated to God in that way.

[9 : 27] And so God says, I knew you. I consecrated you. And that's why I appointed you a prophet to the nations. In times of discouragement during his prophetic ministry, it must have brought Jeremiah no small comfort to know and to remember this truth.

God who knew him before he was conceived, God who consecrated him before he was born, he's the one who appointed him to be prophet to the nations.

Given the gravity of this calling, it's really not surprising to see Jeremiah's response. Look at what he says in verse 6. Follow along with me. Ah, Lord God, behold, I do not know how to speak, for I'm only a youth.

Of course, Jeremiah is not saying that he literally doesn't know how to speak. He's speaking excuses just fine, right? So what he means is that he doesn't know how to speak well, for I am only a youth.

He says, I'm just an inexperienced youth, God. Who am I to be a prophet to the nations? It's similar to the excuse that Moses gives in Exodus 3.11.

[10 : 36] Moses says to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he says, Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.

Same response. It's interesting, isn't it? And when we look at Moses and Jeremiah and their response to God, we should not look down on them as being faithless and weak because that's really the appropriate response when God calls you to something so majestic, so amazing, so significant.

Because who in this world is worthy of speaking the very words of God? When we are called to minister God's word to others, and I don't mean just the preachers like me, but everyone who assumes any evangelistic, discipling, or teaching role that involves opening up the very word of God to people, there should be an appropriate humility and reticence.

Isaiah 66, 2 says, But this is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Do we tremble at God's word? Are we humble in our approach to God's word? Or are we confident in our own abilities?

[12 : 10] In our own training? In our own experience? In our own maturity? It doesn't matter how gifted we are, we must always approach the word of God with humility, in submission, because it's in our humility that the glory of God shines forth more brightly, because it's in our weakness that the power of God is made perfect.

And we see this reality at work in God's response to Jeremiah in verse 7. Look with me. I love God's response here. Do not say, I am only a youth, for to all to whom I send you, you shall go.

And whatever I commend you, you shall speak. Notice God doesn't deny that Jeremiah is only a youth. God doesn't say, Oh no, Jeremiah, you're actually quite old enough.

God doesn't say, Oh, Jeremiah, no, you're actually quite immature. That's okay. You can do this. He doesn't say that. God does not ground Jeremiah's mission on Jeremiah's competence, but on Jeremiah's call.

The fact that God himself called him. God says, You are my chosen ambassador to go wherever I send you, because you are my chosen messenger to speak whatever I command you.

[13 : 24] What gives Jeremiah confidence, then it's not his own competence, but God's calling. Not that he is qualified, but that God has consecrated him.

So God continues in verse 8, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.

I went to Revere Beach last Monday with my wife and two kids, and my older daughter was, she's not here, thankfully, so I can mention this, she's afraid of the waves.

She had a hard time going to the water, and so I kept holding her and telling her, this is what I kept reminding her, I will carry you. I will go in with you. You don't need to be afraid.

The waves will not overwhelm you. God's doing the same thing with his servant here in Jeremiah. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.

[14 : 31] Notice the contrast. Don't be afraid of them, for I will be with you. They are mere men. They are mere flesh. They are mortal beings, but I am the immortal God.

I am the sovereign Lord of the universe. Don't be afraid of them. I will be with you. Let the whole world oppose you and come against you in full force and throw at you all its wiles and weapons.

Let Satan and all his minions, all his hellish crew, be unleashed upon you, even yet I am with you to deliver you.

Do not be afraid of them. Children of God, that's who we are. Is that not sufficient for us? Is it not enough assurance for us to go wherever God calls us to go and to speak whatever he calls us to speak?

Why fret and worry, but I don't have this gnat. I can't do this gnat. God says, I am with you.

[15 : 45] Then it says in verse 9, the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said to me, behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

Jeremiah is consecrated to God not to air his own opinions and ideas, but to proclaim the very words of God. And notice how personal and intimate that description is. It pictures God taking his hands and putting his words in Jeremiah's mouth.

Here, be my mouthpiece. Here, be my spokesperson. And it continues in verse 10, See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

This verse really functions as a thesis of the book of Jeremiah. And earlier in verse 5, God said, I appointed you a prophet to the nations, right? And this is what Jeremiah's call as the prophet and his appointment as a prophet entails.

It's to be set over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Jeremiah wields this awesome, magnificent authority only because he is representing God.

[17 : 04] God. And notice that Jeremiah is not merely appointed as a prophet over Judah, but over nations and over kingdoms. Why?

Because God is not God only over Judah. God is God over all nations. Since the sovereignty of God is not limited, the scope of Jeremiah's ministry is not limited.

Do you believe this? God is not merely the God of the United States of America. but God is God over all nations.

God is God over Tokyo, over Shanghai, Jakarta, Delhi, Lagos, Sao Paulo, Cairo. God is God over all the cities, all the nations and that's why foreign missions must exist because there are still places in this world where the word of God has not been proclaimed, where the word of God has not yet been received.

God's not merely the God of you and me, of our families. God is also the God over your friends and neighbors and that's why it's necessary that we share the word of God with them because God is God over all because he alone deserves to be worshipped because every tongue should confess that he is Lord because every knee should bow down to worship the one true God.

[18 : 39] That's why it's so important to proclaim the word of the Lord. Do you believe this and do you long for this? As those who are consecrated to the sovereign Lord, we should boldly declare the word of the Lord.

that's Jeremiah's consecration. And finally, having told Jeremiah of his consecration prior to his birth, God speaks in greater detail about Jeremiah's commission in verses 11 to 9.

It says, verse 11 and following, And the word of the Lord came to me saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see an almond branch. Then the Lord said to me, You have seen well for I am watching over my word to perform it.

The word almond looks and sounds very similar to the word watching in Hebrew. So this is a word play and Jeremiah is looking at an almond branch presumably and the region of Anathoth where Jeremiah comes from is still to this day known for its almond trees and almond trees is the first tree that blooms in that region.

So he's presumably looking at an almond tree and the word of the Lord comes to him. Almond, watching. The Lord God is watching to fulfill his word. Just as surely the blooming of the almond tree announces the coming of spring, God is watching over his word and soon he will surely perform it.

[20 : 10] Then Jeremiah receives another word of the Lord in verses 13 to 16 this time while he is looking at a boiling pot. It's as ordinary an object as you can imagine. The word of the Lord came to me a second time saying, what do you see?

And I said, I see a boiling pot facing away from the north. A boiling pot facing away from the north it means that the mouth of the pot, the boiling pot is facing south.

So it's being poured out from north to south. And then in verses 14 to 16 God explains what that picture means. Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land.

For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north declares the Lord and they shall come and everyone shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.

and I will declare my judgments against them for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.

[21 : 15] Jeremiah prophesied this judgment, this outpouring of God's wrath when Judah was doing well. When the Assyrian empire that had been their oppressors was declining and they were beginning to exert their strength as a nation, Jeremiah prophesied this and it came exactly true because the Babylonian empire rose from their north and they invaded Judah from the north and they did establish their own throne at the gates of Jerusalem because Israel had forsaken God and had made offerings to other gods and worshipped the idols that they made with their own hands.

In light of this impending judgment of God, Jeremiah's commission is explained with a series of commands in verse 17. Look with me. But you dress yourself for work.

Arise and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them lest I dismay you before them. So there's three things, main things here.

First, Jeremiah is to dress himself for work and arise. Right? So they're really related commands. Translated more literally, it means to gird up your loins and stand up. This is a familiar metaphor in the ancient world because men wore long robes and before they could do anything that requires any kind of physical exertion, they had to gird up their loins, literally pull up their robes and tuck it under their belt so that they could run or engage in more rigorous physical activity.

And so what Jeremiah is about to do requires rigorous work, hard work. It's not something that he could do casually. Proclaiming the word is not something we do casually in our free time or lackadaisically.

[22 : 58] So Jeremiah should roll up his sleeves, he says. So just get up and brace yourself, dress yourself for action. That's the first command. The second command is say to them everything that I command you.

Jeremiah's commission, like I mentioned, is a prophet and a herald. He is not to edit the message God's given him nor to add or subtract from the message God has given him. But he is to speak the very words that God puts into his mouth.

No more and no less. He is to say everything that God commands him. That's the second command. And the third command is at the end of verse 17. Do not be dismayed by them lest I dismay you before them.

This is the final warning of sorts. It's similar to what God said earlier in verse 5. Do not be afraid. But this part includes almost a warning, a threat. He's saying don't fear them or be dismayed by them because if you're dismayed by them, I myself will dismay you before them.

That's what God is telling Jeremiah. A Bible commentator named John Thompson explains this really helpfully. He says it this way. If Jeremiah draws back in fear and flees from his mission, he will encounter not merely men as adversaries, but God himself.

[24 : 10] If Jeremiah was afraid before men and lacked trust in his divine commissioner, he would be defenseless. A man who fears man has also got to fear.

Being dismayed by people, what the Bible sometimes calls the fear of man, ensures that we will act to please people, please men and women, not to please God.

If we fear people more than we fear God, man, not God, becomes the ultimate authority of our lives. So that we can no longer call ourselves truly servants of God.

For this reason, God says, if we are dismayed by people, because when we are dismayed by people, we will not be pursuing his will, we will be going against his will, then God himself will oppose us and dismay us.

And lest this charge be too daunting for Jeremiah, God assures him yet again in verses 18 to 19. And I behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land.

[25 : 30] They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you. Wonderful images, right? God will make him a fortified city that is impervious to the arrows of the enemy.

God will make Jeremiah like an iron pillar that cannot be toppled. This image reminds me of the bollards. You guys know what bollards are? I just learned this week. I knew, I've seen it before, but I didn't know what it was called and looked it up.

And you know how sometimes government puts these kind of low post, heavyweight iron kind of posts in front of buildings so that you can't drive into it. So to protect against terrorist attacks and such, so that people can't ram cars into the building.

They have these bollards. And these things are, they're really strong. They're made of iron or steel usually. And when a car runs into them, it kind of gets crushed like a can of soda. It's really sturdy.

That's the kind of image that I see when he talks about iron pillars. God's going to make Jeremiah like an immovable iron pillar. And then God will make him like an impenetrable wall, bronze walls.

[26 : 36] Yes, he will face much opposition from people in positions of power. From kings, officials, priests, and all the people of the land. They will fight against him, but they will not prevail against him for, again, the same reason God gave earlier, I am with you to deliver you.

And if you're with us through the series, you'll see at the end that God keeps that promise. So this was Jeremiah's context and consecration and commission, but in our own context, we too have been consecrated and commissioned by our Lord.

1 Corinthians 8.3 and Galatians 4.9 both describe the Christian as someone who has become known by God, who has been known by God. The same wording that is used to describe Jeremiah's call and consecration.

Just as God knew Jeremiah before he was born, God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He knew us. Likewise, in John 17, 17 to 19, Jesus says this for all of his followers.

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth.

[27 : 57] The words consecrate and sanctify are the exact same words in Greek. So God, Jesus is praying here, Lord, just as I consecrate myself for your service, I now consecrate your people and send them out in your name to do your work.

That's us. In the very same way Jeremiah was known by God and was consecrated for his service, we have been known by God. And we have been consecrated for his service.

And what is the word that we are to proclaim? I mentioned earlier that Jeremiah's consecration and commission very closely resemble that of Moses. And I don't think that's a coincidence.

I think Jeremiah is intentionally styling himself as a prophet that's in the tradition of Moses. Because in Deuteronomy 18.18, God promised Moses this, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among brothers.

And I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him. Sounds similar, right? Those last two phrases. I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak whatever I command him.

[29 : 04] Those two phrases were used exactly to refer to Jeremiah's calling in verses 7 and 9. And so Jeremiah is hopeful that he is in this tradition of Moses, that he is a prophet like Moses who is to come for God's people to proclaim it.

But Jeremiah was neither the last prophet like Moses nor the greatest prophet like Moses because Acts 3.22 tells us that Jesus Christ who came was the ultimate prophet like Moses.

The one to whom Jeremiah and Moses were pointing to. Jesus is the greater Moses and the greater Jeremiah. Why? Because not only does he have the word of God in his mouth, Jesus is the very embodiment of the word of God.

He's the word made flesh. John 1.14 says, Jesus is the word of God.

made flesh. He is the word of God. So then, the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah also came to us in a much greater, deeper sense.

[30 : 21] Because Jesus ultimately fulfilled the message of judgment and restoration Jeremiah proclaimed. Right? Jeremiah proclaims Judah's imminent judgment and prophesies that the nations will be judged in the future and God's people will be restored.

But Jesus fulfilled that ultimately. He fulfilled the judgment of God by dying on the cross for our sins. He bore the judgment of God, absorbed the wrath of God, bore the due punishment that we rightly should have received.

And not only did he fulfill the judgment of God, he also fulfilled the restoration that people like Jeremiah prophesied. Because in dying for our sins, God the Son, Jesus Christ gives us his righteousness so that we can be restored to fellowship with God and be reconciled to him.

That's what we call the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word of the Lord. If you're not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, I plead with you to believe this word today.

To receive Jesus Christ into your life. We all, like Judah, as described in verse 16, have forsaken our Lord.

[31 : 33] We have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands. Every single one of us, though we were created to worship God, we have turned to our own ways and we have been living for ourselves.

And apart from Christ, apart from he who fulfills this judgment and restoration, we cannot be restored to our creator. And if you're already a follower of Christ, let me remind you that as those who are consecrated to the sovereign Lord, we should boldly declare the word of the Lord.

Because this message of Christ is not merely for us, it's for the nations, it's for our neighbors, it's the good news of Jesus Christ, that's the vehicle of God's saving power, so we have to declare it boldly.

Let's not say, I do not know how to speak. I'm only a youth. Let's not be afraid of them. For God is with us to deliver us.

Please, let's take some time to reflect on that truth. Think about in what ways God may be calling you to respond to this, in what contexts, in what relationships. God may be calling you to declare boldly this word, this gospel of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 53] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.