

Called to a Dying Nation

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Bible Verse: Jeremiah 1
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Suppose that I told you this morning that the world had lost its way, nations and great men are struggling for supremacy, political leaders are corrupt, the population has rebelled against God, men are openly marked by dishonesty and greed, there is violence in the streets, and on top of that the so-called people of God have gone cold, they turn to false teachers rather than God's word for their guidance? You would think probably, especially in the times in which we live this morning, that I was describing the modern situation in the United States of America but I'm not. I'm describing the background to the book of Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah. That's where we're going to study over the next few Sundays just in a survey fashion, the book of Jeremiah and I invite you to turn there with me.

That great prophet served the Lord in dark days, not unlike our own. The previously dominant nation of Assyria was in decline. The nation of Babylon was on the rise and ascending to power in its own right. The people of God were steeped in idolatry and the occasional reforms that kings introduced always proved to be superficial. It never lasted. There was never a permanent revival that came as a result of the changes. There were faithful prophets just as today there are faithful men of God who proclaim the word of God, but the political leaders, those with power, were corrupt and as a result of that false prophets flourished even in the midst of those who were the true prophets of God. Jeremiah served the Lord in dark days and we find in his book that very tone, but what we're going to see as we go through over these next few weeks, what we're going to see, there's two little phrases that I want you to keep in mind: the sovereign purpose of God, and the sovereign provision of God. I'm here today not to speak so much to the nation because that's ridiculous, the nation is not listening to me, but there are the people of God here that think and hear and listen to God's word, and what you and I have to understand and we're going to illustrate this through the life and ministry of Jeremiah is this, is that God has a sovereign purpose in everything that is happening and what you and I must remember in the midst of that is that he not only has a macro-sovereign purpose that he is working out but he sovereignly put you and me into the world at this time in this situation and therefore we have to respond to the sovereign purpose of God with a sense of understanding that God's hand is at work in everything that happens, rather than trembling in fear at what might come. Secondly, we must understand and remember that God has made sovereign provision for his people even in the darkest of times. God has a sovereign purpose and he raises up his people from generation to generation to serve him,

to proclaim the truth, and to be faithful to him in the midst of a land of great unfaithfulness, and as he does that, as he raises us up, he provides for us. He has given us everything that we need in our Lord Jesus Christ. He has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to give us wisdom, to give us strength to direct our paths.

And so as we look out on an equally corrupt, if not more corrupt world than what Jeremiah faced, we must keep in mind that we are here in the sovereign purpose of God and that we are blessed by and enabled by the sovereign provision of God. God has established what would happen before it takes place. He knows the end from the beginning which means that his purposes will certainly be carried out. There is nothing contingent in the mind of God, even though it is contingent to us what is going to happen over the next several weeks and several months to come. God does not see it, God does not operate in the realm of contingency even though his purposes are unfolding to us in time. God is beyond time. God is beyond contingency. He is the sovereign author of everything that happens.

Now beloved, if the Bible teaches that and it does, and if we believe that and we do as a church, that is what we believe, then we understand that all of our causes for fear and anxiety and uncertainty and trembling have been banished because we understand that there is a greater unseen purpose unknown to the world that is at work and is certainly being carried out by the hand of the one that we call our heavenly Father, at the hand of the Father who sent his only Son to live, die and rise again to redeem his sinful people. Now if those things are true and they are, then it has massive consequences for the way that we respond to life and to the uncertainty that is around us. It is not unloving, it is not unkind, contrary to what I've heard others say in recent days to this effect, it is not unkind to tell people that and to call them out of their anxiety and into the realm of trusting God. It is not unkind to tell people that. It is unkind to hide it from them. It is unkind not to speak it. It is unkind to watch professing Christians live in weakness and in fear and in trembling, scared of their own shadow, so to speak, and to stand silently by when the Bible says these great and glorious things about the sovereign purpose and the sovereign provision of God. Why would you not want to make that the primary thing that you speak about in a time like this? I can't understand that. I don't understand men who stand in a pulpit and want to hide that at a time like this in a false and misdirected guise of sympathy and understanding for the struggles that people are going through. Can you imagine a doctor dealing with a patient that way, knowing the sickness and disease that is racking the patient's body? He knows what the cure is even though the patient might not, he has the ability to deliver the cure to what ails the patient, but rather than doing that and helping in the medical situation for which he has been trained and supposedly has all this experience in, he chooses instead to silence himself on his medical expertise and just sit down and sympathize in the weakness and trembling of his patient. That doctor would rightly be sued for malpractice and would rightly have judgments rendered against him for not using his skill to help the patient who has come to him. Even if the surgery or the treatment is painful for a time, even though it creates discomfort for the moment, there is deliverance on the other side. Well, beloved, this is what pastors need to understand in the days in which we live. If we believe in the sovereign purpose and sovereign provision of God, then we owe it to the people who are trembling and frightened in the midst of the

world in which we live, we owe it to them to proclaim these truths because we understand it is the medicine that will help their souls even if they don't understand it at the time that you are giving it to them.

Now I'm speaking with what I said there kind of beyond the walls of our church. I know that you're here because you want to hear about the sovereign purpose of God, you want to hear about the sovereign provision of God, you believe that and yet you're like me and you struggle and stumble a bit along the way. We all need to come to God's word and be built up by it. It's the word of God that transforms our minds. It's the word of God that transforms our lives and not simply the bare reading of the words on the page but an understanding of the meaning and significance of those words and what their present application is and what it means for us. Times like this pull out what men really believe both in spiritual leadership and in the pew, and what we want to do today is we want to pull out, as it were, that which would honor our sovereign God, would honor the sovereign Christ who willingly lay down his life for us, the sovereign God who loves his people and will protect them through thick and thin, through storm and calm.

Well, let's look at this in the life of Jeremiah. Today, just so you have a sense of what we're going to do, we're primarily going to limit ourselves to the first chapter of Jeremiah and then we'll deal with bigger chunks in coming weeks, and I just want to give you a little bit of an overview and help you to see this book, as it were, from the perspective of Jeremiah because Jeremiah, you might say it's an emotional book, it's a transparent book. Not every biblical author lets us see inside his heart but Jeremiah does and we find in the works of Jeremiah and in the words of Jeremiah things that are of great significance for the way that we approach our lives in the times in which we live. So I'm going to break it down into two sections here this morning. We're going to see that Jeremiah had a particular call, he had a particular call, and secondly, we're going to see that Jeremiah had a painful call. A particular call and a painful call. A particular call expressing the sovereign purpose of God. A painful call illustrating that in his weakness there was still the sovereign provision of God as he ministered as he did. So a particular call and a painful call.

We learn about Jeremiah's background in the very opening verse, chapter 1, verse 1, where it says this, "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin," Benjamin being one of the southern tribes. What we see here is that Jeremiah came from, he was the son of a priest and so he came from a line that was devoted to the ministry of God, and the village that is mentioned there, Anathoth, was about two miles northeast of the city of Jerusalem, and so he was very close to the capital, very close and involved with the events that were taking place, being in a priestly family, being so close to the operating center of the nation, Jeremiah was acquainted with everything that was happening. And as we continue to read, we find that Jeremiah had a very lengthy prophetic ministry during the course of his lifetime.

Look at verses 2 and 3 with me. "The words of Jeremiah," verse 1, "to whom the word of the LORD came." In other words, Jeremiah is the one to whom the word of the Lord

came. Jeremiah received revelation, received visions from the Lord that he was to proclaim to the people in the midst of their desolate and depraved days.

And when did this happen? Well, they didn't date events by calendar dates like you and I do, like we do today, they dated them in reference points to the kings that reigned at the time and what we see is this, that "the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month." Now without going in and tracing all of the chronology of this, I'm just gonna ask you to take my word for it for the sake of time, these kings in this ministry that Jeremiah took place from about the year 627 BC until the time that Jerusalem fell in 586 BC and beyond that as well. Jeremiah continued his ministry even after the fall of Jerusalem. Here's all I want you to see about this chronology is that when you do the math from these opening verses and the historical information that is contained in the book of Jeremiah that follows, Jeremiah ministered over the course of about 50 years, give or take. He had an extended long ministry. He ministered and served in that prophetic role longer than many of you have been alive and so we see that this was a man who in the midst of this depravity stood and ministered the word of God in the midst of great opposition, as we will see, and did so over the course of a very long period of time.

Now there's another aspect of this that I could have shuffled into the second part of it but I think it bears mentioning now. If you'll turn over to Jeremiah 16 with me in the first four verses, you see this. Jeremiah 16, the first four verses, "The word of the LORD also came to me saying, 'You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons or daughters in this place.'" In other words, Jeremiah was unmarried as he did this. He did not have the comforts of a wife alongside him. He did not have someone to go home to and to unburden his heart to in the midst of his struggles. The Lord withheld from him the comforts of human life in the course of his prophetic ministry. He conducted that extensive ministry as a single man and so he bore a particularly heavy load, and as we'll see as we go along here, there was very little by the way of external human support to him in the midst of it. God called him as a prophet during dark times in the nation of Judah. God revealed to him and through him that God was about to punish his people for their sin and that this uprising nation of Babylon would carry them all into exile. Jeremiah was a prophet telling people things that they did not want to hear, giving them bad news. He was not a seeker-sensitive prophet at all. He predicted the judgment to come well in advance of its actual occurrence, and he was an eyewitness to it as it came to pass. He prophesied and he saw his own prophecies come to pass. Incredible to think about.

What I want you to see in what we've said so far is simply this: as you're reading these words of Jeremiah and I encourage you over the coming weeks to just read through Jeremiah once or twice and just let it get familiar to your mind that way, Jeremiah's ministry was difficult. It was hard and there was little of external encouragement to keep him going just as some of you experience life in that realm. It's difficult, there's not a lot of support, it's lonely, and you don't know what's coming next. Well, you would have a

sympathetic friend in the prophet Jeremiah. Here's what we need to see as we grasp that and take it into, absorb what the significance of that is. Yes, it was hard. Yes, it was lonely. But it was God's sovereign purpose for Jeremiah to live a life just exactly like that. This is what God had appointed for Jeremiah to do and you see that clearly as you continue reading in chapter 1, verse 4. This is what God had appointed for Jeremiah to do and there is no denying this.

Verse 4, "Now the word of the LORD came to me saying," Jeremiah 1:4. I'll give you a moment to turn back there. I think I left you stranded in chapter 16. Jeremiah 1:4, "Now the word of the LORD came to me saying," and so now we're going to read a quotation of what the Lord said to Jeremiah. God said and I quote, to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." God formed him in the womb with this purpose and from before the beginning of time, God had established his intentions for the life of Jeremiah. What Jeremiah's life subsequently was like was the outworking of the original purpose of God and he tells him that he would be a prophet to the nations, not simply to his own countrymen but as we'll find in about four weeks, that he was preaching to all of the modern nations around him as well. It's a stunning ministry that was given to this man to speak to his people about their own impending doom if they refused to repent, and then to go beyond that to tell surrounding nations what was going to happen to them all in judgment, for those nations anyway, the surrounding nations. Here's what we need to see: God sovereignly planned Jeremiah's ministry before he was born. Look at the words here and as I like to say, look at the subject, verb and direct object. Who is acting upon whom here? God says in verse 5 to Jeremiah, "I formed you. I knew you. I consecrated you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Now that's very important to understand at the start because at this point in the book you don't know yet exactly what's going to unfold for Jeremiah. When God called him, we'll see in a moment, he was a young, a very young man at the time. Jeremiah had no idea what the unfolding consequences of that statement would be to him but the foundation of the book of Jeremiah, the foundation of his ministry is God telling him, "I chose you to do this. I have a sovereign purpose for you." Jeremiah was on the receiving end of a prophetic call. God chose Jeremiah and formed him specifically for this prophetic ministry.

Now that is staggering. In the midst of world instability and the rebellion of God's people, Jeremiah would be a literate mouthpiece for God speaking to nations and Jeremiah, unlike modern-day men of spiritual prominence, many of them anyway, Jeremiah did not respond and say, "Cool! I'm gonna be somebody, then." No, Jeremiah realized that what was being said here was of great consequence and he was intimidated by the prospect of what he had just heard.

Look at in verse 6, "Then I said, 'Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth.'" "God, you must, how can you do this to me? How can you call me? I'm not an eloquent speaker and I'm a youth." The term probably indicates a man who's maybe around 20 years old or so, again give or take a few years. We won't fuss

over precise chronology around it. His point is, "I am too young and too inexperienced to do this."

It reminds me of the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3, if you want to turn over there. We'll just take a little breather here for a moment. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves," we're inadequate for what we do, but we have an adequacy that is from God. He said elsewhere to the Corinthians, "I was with you in weakness and fear and in much trembling." You see in the men that God calls in Scripture that there is this humility, there is this recognition of the awesomeness of the task. You realize that the men are not boastful and self-confident in it. The majesty of the call overwhelms them and staggers them.

Compare that to something I read recently of a local prominent pastor. I don't know where these guys, I don't know where these guys get their mind from honestly. Openly stating that his goal for a coming year, I don't know if this was last year or if I was reading an older article, it doesn't matter, but his goal was to get himself up to 100,000 Twitter followers so that he could be a man of greater influence. Look, that's, the pomposity of that is just frightening to me. It was certainly not a reflection of the attitude that you see in Jeremiah. Jeremiah had it from God that he was going to have a ministry of broad influence and he takes his hands and puts them over his face and says, "O God, what are You doing to me? So much responsibility and so much inadequacy. I'm not a statesman." And at that age, Jeremiah had no visible credentials for his call that would call people to listen to him. There was nothing of experience. There was nothing of prominence. God took this young man and said, "Here's what I have for you to do."

And so these opening verses are creating attention as we read them, attention that the more humble among Christians understand in their own lives. "This is beyond me what I have to do. This life and my responsibilities, this is beyond me." And what we see illustrated in the life of Jeremiah is this, is that God makes a sovereign call based on his sovereign plan and we don't measure that in human terms or approach it in human strength. Let me say that again. We don't measure it in human terms and we don't see its fulfillment in terms of human strength. By a human measure, Jeremiah was too young, too weak, too inexperienced, and too unprepared for what was in front of him. But by the divine measure, in God's perspective, in God's plan everything was perfectly lined up exactly the way he wanted it to be so that you see God responding to Jeremiah's protest in verse 7, "But the LORD said to me." Jeremiah had just protested his youth. "God, what are You doing to me here? How could I possibly do what You've set before me to do?" And, "the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, "I am a youth," Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you,' declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant.'"

God tells Jeremiah, "This is not about your ability, it's about Mine. It's about My call on your life to do what I have called you to do and what I will help you to do, and what I will protect you to do. And so do not protest your human weakness any longer, recognize who I am," God says, as it were to Jeremiah, "recognize who I am, what I have called you to do, and the fact that I am with you." And the underlying message of all of that is this, "I am enough for you to accomplish everything that I have set before you to do." It's reminiscent, isn't it, of 2 Corinthians 12, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

Look, whether we're looking at our personal circumstances, personal weakness, and just seeing the crumbling infrastructure of life all around us, health, boldness, sanctification, say, "Man, this is just falling apart in my own life." Or if we're looking at the uncertainty of the future that the next 50 days hold for us, a whole lot at stake and lots of violence in the streets, thankfully not in our local area, but violence in the street, violence done in pulpits of men not being faithful to the truth, all the uncertainty of political machinations taking place even as we speak, and we feel the weight of that, we feel the uncertainty of that either personally or nationally or whatever level it is that you are overwhelmed by what's happening, and yet we step back from all of that and say, "You know what? Let me just cover my ears and stop thinking about that for just a moment and think about something of greater, more transcendent importance. Whatever is happening in my life or whatever is happening in the world around me is an outworking of the sovereign purpose of God." You can't read the Bible and deny that. God works even through the sinful actions of men to accomplish his purposes. He was working through the sinful actions of men in the day of Christ to bring about our redemption. They crucified him wrongly, they crucified him sinfully and yet God used that to accomplish the purchase price of our salvation. And so we see that there's a sovereign purpose at work, that all of the uncertainty is not uncertain to God, and we view life through that superlative, noble, transcendent perspective. Whatever level you want to enter into, the sovereign purposes of God whether it's your personal life or national life or the spiritual lives of those that you care about and are unresponsive to the gospel, wherever you want to enter into it, wherever you want to enter into this realm of God's sovereignty you find that it is comprehensive in everything that it covers.

There is no aspect of our lives that is outside of the sovereign purpose of God, and then you remember, here I am living at such a time as this. This is the life that God has prepared for me. Right now this is it. This is what God has given to me and whatever, I say this sympathetically, my friends, I realize I'm speaking in a strong tone of voice here today, lots of reasons for that, I guess. Listen to me, this is life transforming: whatever the bad decisions that you've made that may have led you into this particular place of difficulty, whatever the sinful actions of family or employers or others may be that have occurred in the past, whatever sins that you have committed in the past that really distorted the outworking of your life from your perspective, whatever we say about that, the fact is that this morning God has taken all of that and prepared you and put you in precisely this day, in precisely this place, and this is the life that God has given to you today and that allows you to stop regretting the past, stop resenting the past, and to look around in your little circle in which you're standing here and say, "This is what God's

given to me now. Now I can look forward. Now I can step forward in life because in one way or another, in ways that I can't understand, this is the life that God has given to me." And maybe I've only got a few years, maybe you've got a few decades. None of that chronology matters under the umbrella of this amazing particular call that God makes on his people in time. We're not called as prophets. There aren't anymore prophets, just like there aren't anymore apostles today, but no less has God sovereignly designed the circumstances of your life and all of your illnesses even, there's so much illness in our congregation right now and people facing things, I just want you to know and to hear from God's word that this is all part of the plan that God has for you. If you're a Christian, it's what he is using to conform you to the image of Christ, to bring you to a point of dependence where you cry out upon him and to him, "God, help me here! I can't do this on my own! God, give me wisdom. I don't know what to do." And it humbles you to bring you to that place of dependence which is the place in which the grace of God operates in your life.

For those of you that are not Christians, and I know there's several in here just exactly like that, the challenges of life are designed to humble you and to see that you're not sovereign, you're not in control, your life and your soul are in danger apart from Christ, and to humble you to the point where you would say, "God, I must need more mercy than even I realize." That's true of all of us. But for you to cry out to Christ for mercy and abandon your self-confidence. Listen, if God has numbered the hairs on your head, Matthew 10, if God clothes the flowers of the field with beauty, if God knows and ordains the falling of a sparrow to the ground, if in all of those little things his hand is found, then isn't it obvious, isn't it the whole tenor of Scripture that everything greater than that is equally in his hand as well? If he cares about the details, surely the greater plan is at hand as well?

You see, your theology matters. What you believe about these things actually affects your life and determines the course of the way that you enjoy the days that God has given to you and how you respond to them, and I think the time is over for Christians to live in a fearful, trembling way that consistently forgets the sovereignty of God and the care of God in their circumstances. There's no reason for us to be living that way. There's no reason for any Christian to live that way and there is no excuse for a pastor to hide that from his people.

And so, look at it, verses 7 and 10 with me again just to highlight it as we go forward. Verse 7, God says, "everywhere I send you, you shall go, all that I command you, you shall speak." I send you. I command you. Verse 8, "I am with you to deliver you. I have appointed you," verse 10, "over nations and over kingdoms to be an agent, an instrument of the outworking of My purposes." Now that's the reality of a particular call that Jeremiah had and the same principles are at work in our own lives. Now here's what you've got to understand. Here's what follows as a consequence of that. God says these things, he points us to our circumstances, we believe him, we take him at his word for what he has said, and then God says, "I've orchestrated this." Now he calls Jeremiah to courage, to live for this God who called him with courageous strength.

Look at verse 16. He calls Jeremiah to courage. Verse 16, God says, "I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands." False religion. Sinful people, wicked people. That's the context in which Jeremiah was about to embark into his ministry. The odds, humanly speaking, were greatly stacked against him, but in light of the particular call that God had made upon him, look at verse 17, God says to Jeremiah, "Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them. Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you." Jeremiah, the whole nation is going to be against you but I'm with you, therefore be strong and courageous.

When the early church father Athanasius was battling for the doctrine of the Trinity and standing alone on the truth of the single essence of God and three persons sharing equally in that essence, the whole religious world disagreed with him and someone came to him, reportedly, and said, "Athanasius, the whole world is against you." And Athanasius responded, "Then I'm against the world." That's the power of truth. That's the power of understanding. That's the kind of courage that is worthy of the God who calls his people to serve him, and the presence of God, the presence of God is sufficient for our trials. That is all we need and, beloved, as others have said and I've stolen the line, I don't even remember who said it, but you will not understand, you will not know experientially that Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have. Once, however, God has stripped you down to that knowledge and that understanding, then your heart explodes with love and gratitude and a sense of courage because you see that that is the reality. To have Christ is to have all and it's a mercy of God to strip away sometimes health, sometimes family, sometimes prosperity, to strip things away until we are in that place of vulnerable dependence where we finally look up and say, "You're all I've got."

Turn over to the book of Habakkuk whose ministry overlapped with Jeremiah's as well. Habakkuk back in that relatively untouched portion of your Bibles in the minor prophets, just before Zephaniah. You say, "Oh, that helps, pastor. Thanks." Okay, let me help you more, just after Nahum. This is what I've just been saying, this is echoed in the closing verses of Habakkuk. He says in verse 17, "Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls." Lord, if you take it all away and I have nothing. I am alive with nothing. "Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength."

And so what we find in this opening chapter of Jeremiah, it kind of serves as a prologue for all of the things that are going to come later. Jeremiah is going to be preaching judgment to an obstinate and unwilling people but God is protecting him through it all and the very length of his ministry, 50 some years of ministry, is an evidence of the faithfulness of God to the task that was at hand. And so there's this very real courage that

we draw from with the presence and the grace of God given to us in the New Testament era in Christ and imparted to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. That's really cool and that really is enough. That really is all we need but, beloved, understand that that doesn't mean that it's easy. What did this call, this particular call mean for Jeremiah the man? Well, number 2, point 2: it was a painful call and we're going to step outside of chapter 1 now to see it. It was painful in so many different ways. Jeremiah proved faithful to that call that God put on him in chapter 1 and he felt a divine compulsion about it that was consuming in his inner man.

Look at chapter 20 now. We'll bounce around a little bit simply to set the stage for what comes in the next few weeks. I want you to step into the sandals of Jeremiah sympathetically. Jeremiah says in verse 8 of chapter 20, "each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, Because for me the word of the LORD has resulted In reproach and derision all day long." He says, "I'm preaching just like God called me to do. I am doing exactly what God would have me to do but it has put me in a place of isolation and rejection to all my fellow men." Some of you know that in family terms, don't you? And so you feel the weight of that, you feel the flame of the fire, as it were, licking at your feet, the tension of that and the sorrow of that, and you start to say, "Is this even worth it? What am I doing here? What am I giving my life to? Why am I doing this? If all it's doing is producing pain, why am I serving the Lord like this," he says hypothetically but then in verse 9 he says, he takes the hypothetical and he holds it up for his mental consideration and he says, "But if I say, 'I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name,'" if I say I'll just walk away from the prophetic call because I'm tired of all of the hassle, I'll just walk away and I think about, I say, well, what if I did that? I find out that that's not an option. "Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it." He says, "I can't walk away from my call because there's this fire in my bones that has to come out. I am under divine compulsion to preach," he says. And so the external opposition is insignificant, it doesn't control that sense of inner compulsion.

Now young men who preach will talk in those terms, "I've got a fire in my bones," and, you know, good for them. You need something to get started in ministry, but what you find in Jeremiah is that as he continued in his ministry and he had this fire in his bones, this overwhelming compulsion and passion in him, it didn't make him hard and dismissive toward the people to whom he was ministering even though they were rejecting him. He was a man of tender heart. He cared and had compassion on the very people who were rejecting him.

Look at Jeremiah 8:20. He's subject to reproach and derision from the people that he preached to. Internally he can't walk away from it despite the unpleasantness of that and yet on the other side of the spectrum, you find this great sense of compassion that he expresses in his preaching. He says in Jeremiah 8:20, "Harvest is past, summer is ended, And we are not saved. For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?" He goes on in chapter 9, verse 1, "Oh that my head were waters And my eyes a fountain of tears,

That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people!" He says, "This, I just weep over what I'm seeing. I weep over the hardness of heart. I weep over the consequences of it."

And in verse 17 of chapter 9, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; And send for the wailing women, that they may come! Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, That our eyes may shed tears And our eyelids flow with water. For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion, "How are we ruined! We are put to great shame, For we have left the land, Because they have cast down our dwellings.'"

Then in chapter 13, verse 15, he says, "Listen and give heed, do not be haughty, For the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God, Before He brings darkness And before your feet stumble On the dusky mountains, And while you are hoping for light He makes it into deep darkness, And turns it into gloom." He's warning them that judgment is imminent. He's pleading with them to repent because it's not going to go well for them if they don't, just like it will not go well for you if you do not repent.

But it goes on and says in verse 17, he's not happy about what he's saying. He loves the people to whom he's preaching. Even though they're rejecting him, he responds in love and he says in verse 17, "But if you will not listen to it, My soul will sob in secret for such pride; And my eyes will bitterly weep And flow down with tears, Because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive." He says, "I know you're opposed to me. I know you're rejecting what I'm saying. I'm not angry with you. I'm weeping over you. My heart is broken because I know what the implications are for you." It's with good reason that Jeremiah is known as the Weeping Prophet, and you know who he was foreshadowing in this compassionate ministry of rejection to his preaching? Our Lord Jesus.

Look at Luke 19. You see the godliness of Jeremiah in the fact that he mirrored some 600 years in advance what our own Lord's attitude would be in preaching in the same place to the same generation of people, generation meaning he's preaching to the Jews. In verse 41, Luke 19:41, Jesus "approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.'" He was not finding pleasure in the judgment which he proclaimed, it broke his heart. He wept over them for the consequences that it meant for them.

And so it was a painful call to Jeremiah because there was this emotional reaction, there was this broken heart over the rejection of the people and he knew what the consequences for them would be, but there was another dimension to it, you might say a lesser dimension. I don't know how you could call it a lesser dimension. There was a parallel dimension to the pain that he experienced in ministry. The men over whom he wept didn't simply reject him, they persecuted him relentlessly. As you read through the book of

Jeremiah, you find that this prophet appointed by God to the ministry that he had, he was the target of murder plots. He was beaten and placed in stocks. Mobs were incited against him. The king destroyed his original writings so he had to do it all over again. He was imprisoned. He was cast into a muddy cistern. He was bound in chains. And that's just a sampling. This was painful. Can you imagine living life that way? That every day you get up and preach to a stubborn obstinate people, they don't repent, you weep over them because you care for them, and the very people that you care for turn around and give you that kind of hostility in return and you're experiencing all of this at the hand of the God who called you to it. Wow. What a life.

You see that Jeremiah's life is a refutation of the health-and-wealth prosperity gospel, you see that, right? You see how the life of Jesus is a rejection of that. He had no place to lay his head. You see how the Apostle Paul's life was a rejection of that, right? Christ said, told Paul he would suffer for his name's sake. Scripture tells us today, 2 Timothy 3:12, that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. The Bible says that it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God, Acts 13:34. Do you see it, beloved? While we are on the receiving end of a particular call of God and he's appointed and prepared the particular life that he's given to us, it may be attended with a whole lot of pain and yet he is with us.

Look at Matthew 28. The call of the church in the midst of persecutions and sufferings and its own rejection, the call of the church is like the call of Jeremiah, take the word of God and preach it. Jesus said to the disciples, by extension to all of the church for all the ages until he returns, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." That's the call. That's what we do. We're Christians, that's what we do. And more and more, we don't have the facade of support of culture propping us up as we do it, preaching it with a cultural affirmation. Those days are gone but the command, the call to do this is not, and so we keep doing it even though it's going to bring greater and greater resistance from the people that we preach to, and as God grows us in sanctification, grows us in godliness, there should be somewhere a corresponding sorrow over what we see happening around us as men willingly plunge deeper into darkness instead of coming to the light that is offered to them. Yes, it appears that our nation is dying. Perhaps God will show mercy and we pray and hope and it would be wonderful to see a sweeping revival, a third Great Awakening to take place across our land. But if not, we realize it may get more difficult as time moves on. The gospel is no more welcome now than it was in the days of Jeremiah.

And so what do we do? We've got this sovereign purpose, this sovereign call on our lives and it could be really difficult, really uncertain in the midst of the days in which we're now living. I didn't finish reading Matthew 28:20, did I? Notice that the same promise that God made to Jeremiah is the same promise that he makes to us, that Christ makes to us as we obey our Lord and go forth speaking that which he's commanded us to do. He says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," so that in our personal lives, in the unfolding nature of life around us, in the proclamation of the gospel, we understand

this supremely, we understand that the presence of Christ with us is sufficient for all of that, and we are satisfied with that even if it is very painful going forward. To the extent that we share in the sufferings of Christ, we'll share in the comfort of Christ. To the extent that they persecute us, Jesus says, "Rejoice, your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

And so it's for us, then, to hear with fresh ears in our day what God said to his prophet Jeremiah. I read it earlier, I'll close with it. God says to his people, "I'm with you." That is above everything else. That surpasses everything else. "I'm with you." Then in Jeremiah 1:17, "Now gird up your loins and arise and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them." It's time for courage. It's time to put away our fears. It's time to put away the symbols of our fear and go forth in the courage that says, "We believe what God has said and we will stake our entire life on it and live accordingly."

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask You for the grace to face our days with the courage of a lion, the courage of a prophet, the courage of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who set His face toward Jerusalem and did not flinch. Thank You that You are with us no matter what. If the call be painful, we'll take heart in the fact that it was particular to us and that You gave and established for us the days that You had for us to live. If it's pleasant, Lord, we'll thank You for the grace. And Father, for those under the sound of my voice, hardened against Christ, living and loving sin, Father, we pray for each one and pray that Your Spirit would bear as a flaming arrow to the center of their heart the warning of Peter to his generation, "O my friend, be saved from this perverse generation. Turn to Christ while there is time." We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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