



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 12 Issue 19

May 19, 2013

The Call of Kingdom Ministry, Part 2

Jeremiah 1:4-19, The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom 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 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 have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth.” But 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.”

The word of the LORD came to me saying, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” And I said, “I see a rod of an almond tree.” Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it.” 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.” Then the LORD said to me, “Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. “For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” declares the LORD; “and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah. “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. “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,” declares the LORD.

Many of us have a set of china, but very few of us use this china for everyday use. Also many of us parents have a nice set of clothes for your children; but few if any of us allow them to play in these clothes during the week. And many couples set up a date night devoted to their relationship; but going out individually with friends, the man with his friends and the woman with hers, isn't how one spends a date night.

Each day and week we make distinctions from the clothes we wear to how we spend our time to the dishes we might use in our eating. And Paul made use of this fact in his exhortation to the church in Ephesus.

2 Timothy 2:20, “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.”

Such is the case when it comes to how we organize our lives; we have things that are common and used for everyday living. But then we have special items which are used only for special events and purposes. To use the Biblical language, these items are “sanctified” and so devoted to a specific/special purpose! God also makes distinctions when it comes to His kingdom. There are those who are “special” to Him through whom He works.

The book of Jeremiah explains this further. Jeremiah relates to us his calling and commissioning unto the prophetic ministry. Now as we have been called in Christ and given the ministry of being a “mini-prophet” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-7; 2 Timothy 2:2; Matthew 28:18-20) we derive application for our lives through the example of Jeremiah. We have seen that Jeremiah's ministry; and ours by way of application, involves a life-encompassing call.

Our Call and God's Claim

Jeremiah 1:5, “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.”

I want to draw your attention to two key words/phrases in this verse: “I knew you” and “I consecrated you.”

These terms imply a divine authoritative choosing, appointing, and commissioning unto a specific calling or service.

“Before I formed you in the womb ***I knew you***” is an important term in the Old Testament (used 944 times). It can denote the apprehension of the bare facts about someone or something- as in the expression, “Do you know of Bob?” (cf. Genesis 29:5; Exodus 1:8; 2 Samuel 3:25). Yet when used of God or on the part of God for His people, the idea is much fuller and richer. For example, it is used as an euphemism for the physical relationship between a man and a woman.

Genesis 4:1a, “Now the man had relations with his wife Eve [lit., “the man knew his wife Eve”], and she conceived and gave birth to Cain...”¹

Based on this passage we conclude that “know” is a relational word of deep significance. You and I can know OF a famous actor or an important individual from history, BUT few of us can say that we “know them”! Indeed, “knowing” someone or something speaks of a level of intimacy, communion, and understanding which surpasses the ability to identify them in a crowd. Hence, the expression is used of God’s knowledge of us.

This term is also used of God’s intimate love bond with His people.

Amos 3:2a, “You only have ***I chosen*** [lit., “known”] among all the families of the earth...”

Now how is it that of all peoples on the earth, God who knows all things can say, “You only have I known”? It is because the “knowledge” referenced in Amos 3 speaks of a love-relationship founded and so based upon a covenantal relationship, a relationship in which God interacts with us as:

- Father, Matthew 6:9.
- Husband, Hosea 2:2.
- Daddy, Galatians 4:6-7.
- Friend, John 15:14.
- Lover, Song of Solomon 4.
- Confidant, 1 Peter 5:7.

The Bible says that God “knew” Moses by “name” and “face to face” (Exodus 33:17; Deuteronomy 34:10). Furthermore, God “knew” the Psalmist’s “sitting and arising” (Psalm 139:2); in fact He “knows” the “number of hairs” on our head (Luke 12:7)- it is that intimate and detailed! Now notice because of the Divine decree in eternity past in which God deigned to save a people unto Himself, the genesis of this covenant relationship can be said to have begun before the world began.

Ephesians 1:4, “...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...”

Ephesians 1:4c-5a, “...In love He predestined us [literally “He pre-knew us”] to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...”

Even though a person has yet to be born, the Bible still can speak of God as having a love relationship with that person prior to their creation since the love-relationship was founded on the part of an Eternal Being in eternity past! That is how the word is used in Jeremiah. Before Jeremiah was born; before the world began, God deigned to have a love relationship with Jeremiah; God deigned to know him! And yet there is more.

Jeremiah 1:5, “Before you were born ***I consecrated you.***”

This phrase, is used for “holy” and therefore denotes both (1) a claiming on the part of God, and therefore (2) a setting apart unto a specific purpose. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament put it this way:

The verb *qādaš*... connotes the state of that which belongs to the sphere of the sacred. Thus it is distinct from the common or profane.” Furthermore we read, “A definitive use of the term occurs in Num 16:38 [H 17:3]. The censers of the Korahites were regarded as holy because they had been devoted to the Lord. They were thus regarded as having entered the sphere of the sacred by virtue of cultic ritual (v. 17 [H 16:18]) and were accorded a special place in the sanctuary. The devotion of the censers seems to have created a condition of inviolable holiness that could not allow for their being treated in a common way.” (emphasis mine) (R. Laird Harris, 2003, p. 786)

Think of the illustration I referenced at the beginning of the articles in a house (2 Timothy 2:20) some are for special uses and some are for a common use. That which is for a special use has been set apart unto a specific purpose; that is the idea behind this word!

- In Exodus 29:21, 37; 30:29 certain articles used in the Levitical service were consecrated to God and were thus recognized as belonging to the realm of the sacred; *they could not be used for common purposes!*
- In Exodus 19:23 when God descended upon the mountain called Sinai, it was set apart unto the purpose of the Lord, as such boundaries needed to be erected lest the “common” touch the mountain and die! IOW, it would have been a bad idea at this time to take a camping trip up Mount Sinai... *the mountain could not be used for mundane things!*
- Leviticus 21:6ff, the same was said of an order of men whom God set apart unto His special service (we call them, “priests”). *They were not to involve themselves in the mundane or the profane. They were claimed by God and therefore devoted to His service at all times and in all places!*
- Leviticus 19:8, the sacrifices to be eaten by the priests were given the designation of “holy.” That meant that *the priest who received such a meal could not invite his Reubenite neighbor over for lunch. The meal was not common!*

Accordingly, for a person to be “consecrated by God” means that that person literally has been hand selected by God for a specific purpose. No longer therefore ought the person to view themselves as their own- nor ought they to involve themselves in matters not pertaining to God (Leviticus 19:2). The “consecrated” individual has become a vessel which God has claimed for His purpose. And by virtue of this calling/consecration, he knows that everything about himself:

- His past.
- His personality.
- His strengths.
- His gifts.
- His upbringing.
- His parents, siblings, and family.
- His virtuous background or his morally defective one.
- His training, inclinations, likes, wants, desires, felt needs...

Everything has been part of the consecrating! It is this term/calling that was used of Jeremiah before he was born! Look again at the verse, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you...: do you see? Before the world began, God deigned to have a love-relationship with Jeremiah by which the Lord would become Jeremiah’s highest good! Furthermore, before Jeremiah was born, God claimed Jeremiah for a specific purpose and calling. What was that calling? Jeremiah’s purpose

in life was to serve the Lord as a “prophet to the nations!” It was to this task he was “appointed,” ordained, and so “given over to”!²

This was Jeremiah’s purpose, the reason God placed him on the earth. And it was with this divine sense of calling that Jeremiah served the Lord in a nation which not only did not like him, but in fact persecuted him unceasingly (including his family, Jeremiah 11:9ff)!

Now as with the principle we saw last week regarding Jeremiah’s call, this one translates directly to us! Just as Jeremiah foreordained before the world began to have a love relationship with God; so were you. Speaking of all believers, Paul writes:

Romans 8:29-30, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Just like Jeremiah, we too have been foreknown by God! And just as Jeremiah was set apart from His mother’s womb to serve the Lord in His Kingdom, so were you. Recall how Paul describes the believer in Christ, “saints by calling” (Romans 1:7) that is “set apart ones!” So, while Jeremiah was “set apart” to serve the Lord as a prophet, so all of God’s people have been set apart unto to God for His purpose and will!

Now you must see that it has been this sense of divine consecration/calling that has impelled many saints of old to live on this earth as living sacrifices. Think of the elders of the faith in Hebrews 11. Implicit in the recorded events pertaining to the lives of the men and women is the conviction that not only was God’s will being done through them, but they had a calling and a purpose that transcended this world! We read about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

Hebrews 11:33-34, “...conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”

What was their “secret”? How is it that they kept at it year in and year out “without receiving the promised blessings” of the Lord (Hebrews 11:13)?

Hebrews 11:40, “Because God had provided [literally “foreseen” and foreordained] something better for [them]³...”

Paul served on this earth with the conviction that he had been “set apart from his mother’s womb to preach Christ among the Gentiles” (Galatians 1:15-16). His life was in God’s hands, and all that he did was with a sense of divine purpose! Notice the strength and comfort this was to him.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [What a dread! Do you realize there were families to whom Paul was called to minister who were widowed and orphaned because of Paul’s acts as an unbeliever? Yet even this did not shake his confidence, for he knew The Doctrine of Consecration- notice...] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

Do you see how the knowledge of God consecrating a man unto service emboldens the Christian? “*The past is the past... the present is as God has ordained! I have a purpose and calling that supersedes the worries*

and concerns of this life! Let me at it!” Listen to the words of E. W. Smith speaking of this doctrine of predestination of the Christian he wrote:

His feet plucked from the horrible pit and planted on the Eternal Rock, his heart thrilled with an adoring gratitude, his soul conscious of a Divine love that will never forsake him and a Divine energy that in him and through him is working out eternal purposes of good, he is girded with invincible strength. In a nobler sense than Napoleon ever dreamed, he knows himself to be a ‘man of destiny.’ (Boettner, 2012, p. 331)

And yet today, it seems the church has lost all sense of this calling. The “trees of life” have blinded us to the “forest” of God in which we live and to which we have been summoned! For example a Dr. John MacArthur made this observation:

Most people living in the church today have no sense of divine mission. They’re just bouncing from job to job and event to event and engagement to engagement and activity to activity. That’s the way they live; that’s the way they raise their kids. There is no sense of an over-arching divine mission. There is no sense... that the birth of every believer was ordained by God, that the death of every believer was ordained by God, which means the middle was ordained by God and for purposes that advance the name of Christ and the glory of the Kingdom, and that’s the last thing on our priority list. (MacArthur, 2013, p. Time 27:30)

Christian, remind yourself again and again that because you are saved you have been called for a purpose! You now live in the realm of the sacred! Everywhere you go, you go as a servant of Christ. Therefore all that you do, whether it be eating or drinking must be done with the knowledge that you are fulfilling a sacred duty of service unto Christ!

You say, “I don’t feel very ‘sacred’! You don’t know my background and my life is a mess!”

Christian, what have we learned about God’s calling? It began in eternity past and encompasses everything about us- such that we must say looking even at our sin, “You/they/the world/even my own sinful will ‘meant it for evil, but God meant it for God!’” Now recognizing this undoubtedly will enable us to stand when all around are falling. But it won’t make our service in Christ’s Kingdom easy.

End Notes

¹ cf. also Genesis 4:17, 25; 19:8; 24:16; Numbers 31:17-18, 35; Judges 21:11-12; 1 Samuel 1:19.

² This is a profound statement requiring a brief discussion. Though Jeremiah was raised in a priestly city amongst a family of priests to serve the Lord as a priest, nevertheless God claimed him and so set him apart unto the calling and work of a prophet. What is this? While a priest speaks to God on behalf of man, a prophet speaks to man on behalf of God.

³ The Hebrew writer ends his teaching in this chapter with a first person plural, “us”. Yet based on the context (cf. vv. 39-40), this clearly is for pastoral purposes to unite all current believers with the promises and course of God in the lives of saints of old. As such, the nuance of the text would include both “them” as well as “us.”

Sources Cited

Boettner, L. (2012). *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing.
MacArthur, D. J. (2013). *A Prophetic Message to an Ungodly Nation*. Retrieved May 15, 2013, from
Grace to You: <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/80-367>
R. Laird Harris, G. L. (2003). *Theological Wordbook fo the Old Testament*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 19, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.