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The Call of Kingdom Ministry, Part 3

Jeremiah 1:4-19, 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.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever 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 put 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 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.” 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 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 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 every one 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. 16 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. 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. 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. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.”

Proverbs 16:9, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”

We see this truth worked out in Paul’s life in his service in the Kingdom of God. As an apostle, Paul knew that God had “set him apart from his mother’s womb” to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15). In the process of working out this call, Paul grew more and more in love with the idea of preaching the gospel in the most important city of his day, Rome! As such, he began planning and, no doubt, praying. In time this led him to his penning an epistle to the believers in Rome in anticipation of a hoped-for visit.

While Paul had never been to Rome, his reputation most likely had- specifically that he was a renegade and someone who rejected the teaching of the Old Testament (Acts 21:21). So, in anticipation of a visit, Paul penned the Book of Romans as a vehicle of introduction with the ultimate goal that one day this church would serve as a base of support for missionary endeavors further west (Romans 15:22-24).

As history has it, Paul eventually did get to Rome. Yet he did not arrive as the strong, winsome “Apostle to the Gentiles”! Rather, he arrived in chains as a common criminal (Acts 28:16; Ephesians 3:1)! This no doubt was hard because Paul made reference to the fact that while he may have been bound in chains, the gospel wasn’t (Philippians 1:12)!

Yet, it is amazing how in God’s providence things don’t work out the way we might plan. Truly, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps!”

For example there was a time in Peter’s life when he planned on making a living though fishing. God instead made him a “fisher of men” (Matthew 4:19). Amos planned for a life as a farmer (Amos 7:14); God gave him the life of a prophet. David planned for the life of a shepherd (1 Samuel 16:11); God called him to serve the Lord as a king. Jonah planned on enjoying the benefits of being an Israelite during the golden era of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25); God sent him

as a servant to the foreign city of Nineveh! Matthew no doubt anticipated the wealthy life of a tax collector (Matthew 9:9); God called him as an apostle. There are many twists and turns of providence! They are as unpredictable as the wind. And because of that, many a plan of man has had to be altered or scrapped in light of God and His plan!

We see this in the life of in Jeremiah. He was raised as a priest (Jeremiah 1:1) and no doubt anticipated the secure life of this calling which involved the noble privilege of serving in the temple from time to time, having a family, raising children, and passing the baton to the next generation. God instead placed on him the call of a prophet (Jeremiah 1:5) with specific instruction that he could not marry (Jeremiah 16:2)! Furthermore, God gave to him graphic visions (Jeremiah 4:19ff) of the destruction of people and places he held so dear! And then he was called to live through all this dark history with a nation opposing him.

Inner Conflict

Jeremiah 1:6, "Then I said, 'Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth'"

After Jeremiah received the call of God unto the prophetic ministry (Jeremiah 1:5) his initial response to being informed of the Divine call was to disagree with it. *"Lord! It can't be! This is not what I want to do with my life! I don't have the gifts!"* But then God touched his mouth (Jeremiah 1:9) and Jeremiah was emboldened such that he never struggled again, right? That is what we might think at first. Yet looking at the book of Jeremiah, we know different. Jeremiah would struggle throughout his 40+ years of ministry- not with the sense of divine call, but with the desire to serve the Lord according to His call.

Jeremiah 1:18, "Now behold, I have made you today [that is, from his birth until now] 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."

We read a passage like this and what comes to mind is the image of an Arnold Schwarzenegger type of guy who stands impervious to the bombs and missiles flying around them:

- They don't struggle with service in the Kingdom of God.
- They never miss a quiet time.
- At all times they love praying and worshipping God.
- Never are they inconvenienced by God or His people.
- They love fellowship and faithfully engage the lost.

They are, as the verse implies, an "Iron Man!" This is how we view this description. And without instruction, this is what we would conclude about Jeremiah.

Do you know what an "Iron Man" looks like in the Kingdom of God? If Jeremiah is the standard,

and there is no reason we ought not to view him as the standard, notice what an “Iron Man” looks like:

- He struggles- genuinely struggles- with God’s will (Jeremiah 4:10).
- He doesn’t like opposition (Jeremiah 20:7).
- The work and service of God at times is a burden (Jeremiah 20:9).
- He is weak... at times hurting ...at times angry ...at times impatient (Jeremiah 20:14ff).

You may think, “Well, Jeremiah was a wimp, an effeminate man- always crying!” But then we read about others:

- Peter and the struggles he had in his service in Christ’s Kingdom. Not only would he be led where HE personally did not want to go (John 21:18), but even after the resurrection of Christ, he still struggled with “foot and mouth” disease. Recall the very public rebuke Paul leveled against him (*for being a man-fearer*) AND which Paul then recorded in Scripture for every Christian throughout all time to read (Galatians 2:11-14)! Yet Peter was considered in the apostolic church to be a “Pillar” (cf. Galatians 2:6)!
- Then there’s Paul. If there was an epitome of what an “Iron Man” was/is, he has to be it! And yet, how did he respond to inability/trial/difficulty from the Lord?

2 Corinthians 12:8, “Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”

In other words, not everything was taken with a smile! “Three times” reflects duration of time in which Paul struggled (think of Luther’s, “God heard you the first time!”¹). Clearly at times in Paul’s life it wasn’t always easy and light! In fact, notice that on his second missionary journey he stumbled.

1 Thessalonians 3:1, “Therefore when we could endure *it* no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone.”

The word used here for “endure” is a maritime word used to refer to a water-tight ship or roof. When Paul no longer could handle it, when the tears no longer could be held in, that is when he sent Timothy to minister on his behalf!

- How about the most humble man that ever lived outside of Christ, Moses? When God called him to serve the Lord in Pharaoh’s court, what did he do? He gave multiple excuses for why God shouldn’t send him. First there was the concern of public opinion.

Exodus 4:1, “What if they won’t believe what I say? What if they think I’m a nut?”

Then there was the concern of personal inability.

Exodus 4:10, "I'm not eloquent in my speech!"

There was the concern of a stubborn heart.

Exodus 4:10, "Sorry Lord, I'm just not going to do it!"

- And then there is Christ Himself who when faced with the difficult calling of the cross spoke thus dripping blood from the pours of His body because He was so burdened.

Matthew 26:39, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me..."

We know Christ didn't sin here, but that doesn't mean He didn't suffer in all ways as we do (Hebrews 4:15)!

Now, would there be any here who would NOT consider Peter, Paul, Moses, or Christ to be "Iron Men" in the Kingdom of God? Yet all of them struggled, just like Jeremiah!²

Christian, are you an Iron Man? In responding, you cannot base your answer on whether or not you struggle when it comes to your service in God's Kingdom. Clearly all faithful servants of Christ at times struggle when it comes to fulfilling God's call! So what makes an "Iron Man"? What constitutes a "Mighty Man" in God's Kingdom?

Jeremiah 1:19, "'And they will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,' declares the Lord."

This is the key to what makes a servant of Christ an "Iron Man." It is what set Moses, Paul, Peter, Jeremiah, and even Christ apart. What is it? It is NOT that they do not struggle; RATHER, it is that in their struggles they persevere! Iron Men, pillars of the faith are set apart as such NOT because they do not struggle. It is because though they struggle, God will never let them go and they know!

Proverbs 24:16, "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in *time of calamity*."

What is the difference between the child of God and the wicked? The child of God falls, but then he always rises again! The psalmist speaking of the genuine servant of Christ wrote:

Psalms 37:24, "When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand."

You must see that Christians fall/struggle just like non-Christians. The difference is that the Christian doesn't fall unto ship wreck or destruction! And how is that? How does the Christian continue to rise up again and again when all the world is falling around them? You must see that it NOT anything inherent in them; BUT on account of that which God gives in Christ, faith!

Look up the word “trust” and you will find it throughout Jeremiah. It truly is one of the themes of this book.

Jeremiah 17:7, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord.”

This is the difference between being “cursed” and thriving in ones walk with God! Speaking of Ebed-Melech a faithful servant of God we read:

Jeremiah 39:18, “For I will certainly rescue you, and you will not fall by the sword; but you will have your *own* life as booty, because you have trusted in Me,’ declares the Lord.”

Ebed-Melech would indeed encounter a difficult providence, yet he would not fail because his trust was the Lord!

Isaiah 30:15a, “For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.’”

And so we see it operating in the lives of God’s struggling people in Scripture.

1 John 5:4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith.”

The early church encountered severe difficulty and trial- so much so that they stumbled in their service in God’s Kingdom (cf. Hebrews 10:32-35). Yet what was the confidence expressed through the Hebrew writer?

Hebrews 10:39, “But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

It wasn’t that the early church didn’t struggle, it is that they persevered in their faith and trust in Christ- this is what makes an “Iron Man!”

Luke 22:31-32, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again [that is, “once you’ve been restored”...], strengthen your brothers.”

Satan demanded permission to sift Peter; the permission was granted and Peter struggled! But he didn’t remain in this condition. Rather he would be restored as he turned again to the Lord in faith! In fact, sticking with Peter notice that during the Last Supper, Christ informed Peter that Peter would deny the Lord three times. This would be Peter’s great struggle (John 13:38) yet listen to the word of consolation that Jesus gave him immediately following the announcement of his betrayal:

John 14:1, “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.”

Christian! We ought not to be surprised at the struggle we have in serving the Lord. Rather, we must endeavor in and through it all to maintain our faith and trust in Christ!

So Christian, do not be shocked when you struggle in your service of Christ; all struggle. Yet that which will make you an “Iron Man/Woman” in the Kingdom of God is the perseverance which God grants you through faith. Accordingly, in and through all things, “do not throw away your confidence” (Hebrews 10:35), but commit yourself to an undying trust in Christ! J. A. Thompson put it this way:

It may be sound theology to say, ‘One man with God is a majority’; but when that one man faces the crowd, in the hour of actual confrontation he needs more than theoretical theology. Nothing less than the deepest conviction that God will be with him will suffice. (Thompson, 1980, p. 149)

With this, notice the rebuke that God gave to Jeremiah in response to his profession of his weakness.

Jeremiah 1:7, “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.’”

Jeremiah needed to hear this rebuke and so do we! See, in spite of Jeremiah’s sense of inability, God was going to use this man! Think of it: if God deigned to use

- Uneducated, weak, powerless individuals- whom He called “disciples” to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6).
- In the words of Paul, “Earthen vessels”/Bed Pans (2 Corinthians 4:7) in which to carry the gospel to the nations.
- The smallest children of Israel (Matthew 21:15-16) from which we get the expression, “Out of the mouths of babes!”
- A donkey as a vehicle of revelation- remember Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22:28).
- God can use anything or anyone! In fact, it is His divine plan to choose the “nobodies” of this earth; you and me, by which to bring about His glorious will!

1 Corinthians 1:26-29, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.”

This is why when after their initial shock at being chosen by God to serve the Lord in His kingdom, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Samuel, David, and many more boldly went forth and “accomplished the work which God had given them” (John 17:4)! See it is not our strengths and

talents that God brings to the table to perform His work; but willing vessels who say relying upon Christ, “Here I am... use me!”

End Notes

¹ A friend of Luther’s committed a sin which became a huge burden to the man. Accordingly, he knelt and prayed repeating over and over all day, “God! Forgive me! God! Forgive me!” Toward the end of the day, Luther approached him and heard his prayer. He then replied, “Brother, get up! God heard you the first time!”

² R. K. Harrison said, “The command ‘fear not’ was given on many occasions in Scripture to the Lord’s servants, including Abraham (Genesis 15:1), Moses (Numbers 21:34; Deuteronomy 3:2), Daniel (Daniel 10:12, 19), Mary (Luke 1:30), Simon (Luke 5:10) and Paul (Acts 27:24).” (Harrison, 1981, p. 54)

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About the Preacher

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