

Sessions – Jeremiah

<http://www.myfishbites.com/sessions-jeremiah.php>

This session is taken from Jeremiah Chapter 1 - take time to read through the chapter before you start on this. You may want to get people to read out. Remember to check with people before if necessary, and not to pick those who don't like reading publicly or who aren't confident with reading.

Prayer (before reading Jeremiah 1)

Let's ask God to speak to us as we hear from his Word, the Bible. Thank you Lord that you speak to us through your written Word and that through your Holy Spirit we can hear from you, get fresh knowledge. Thank you that you speak to us, encourage us, shape us and challenge us through hearing and obeying your Word. Today we pray that we'd be open to your Spirit speaking to us and that we would not leave the session or this week without being changed by you. Thank you Jesus. Amen!

Call of Jeremiah

In verse 4, we read that the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah..

How about you? Will the word of God come to you? If so, how? You know what, if we don't read the Bible, got into the word of God, actually at least opened up the book - looked at the Bible online - then how can we expect the Word of God to come to us? It won't come floating in through the window or on a passing bus. Put it another way, how often do you text or speak to your closest friend? If you don't speak, you can't hear what they're saying. It is the same with God. If we're not listening, not even looking, God won't be able to speak as often as he could if we were. The other thing we know about the Bible is that it is truth, God's written words to us. We know they are reliable, we know that they impact our lives and the lives of others. If we don't read, we slip, we aren't changed and God won't be able to use us to help change this world as effectively. The Bible is like a sword of fire in your hand. You need to arm yourself and then start swinging that sword in word and action. **How often do you read your Bible?**

Known to God even before he was in the womb

We read an amazing statement from God in verse 5 that before Jeremiah was even formed in the womb, God knew him. The same is true for you..

Have you ever been in a line up for a sports or cheerleading team (or similar)? If you have, you may have been one of those people wanted on their team. You may have been (or seen) those who weren't chosen till last, or those who no-one wanted at all. It's the ultimate rejection.

Yet God has already provided the ultimate acceptance - he accepted, wanted, loved, chose you before you were even born. This suggests value. The ultimate value.

On a sliding scale of 1-10 and just shouting answers out loud, assess how value you feel. Now think about other people around you, where do they fit on a sliding scale of value?

You see, God is very relevant and understands the importance of value. People long for value - they join clubs, gangs, communities, get into certain kinds of music as it accords them value. But this value is only limited and temporary. As we've said elsewhere on this site, value is determined by the price you would pay for something. And God paid the ultimate price, he sent his Son Jesus who died on a cross so that we can have an opportunity to be right with God.

Jeremiah was set apart before he was born

Do you ever stress and worry about what to do with your life? I do. So let's go back to our illustration about the team. Think about the teams that you've been involved with, or watched, or helped with. On what basis are people chosen for a team? (Shout out answers). The main answer is their skill or usefulness to that team. It is the same with God's team - his people, Christ's followers.

Where I live, they are starting up a massive new city centre building project. On this project they are employing brickies, carpenters, designers, architects, project managers, admin people, PR people. But they are working together on a plan. That plan is the rebuilding of a part of the city centre. It has a plan drawn up by the architects and the others are employed to complete the plan. This is a picture of the church - it is a picture of your life too - as God has chosen you to be part of his far more important and extraordinary, exciting project - the preaching of the gospel to transform people's lives. Your role is different to mine. But you have a role, you were appointed to this role and God will help you in this as he chose you for it..

You were set apart before you were born. The Bible tells us in Ephesians that before the world began, God chose us in Christ (Ephesians 1.5) and also set us apart. To be set apart means to have a special purpose. It means to be different. If we read the rest of Ephesians 1.5 we read that God set us apart '*..to be his holy people - people without blame before him.*' (This can only be achieved because of what Jesus has done and if we accept Jesus as Lord).

Paul and Barnabas were 'set apart' to go to the Gentiles (non-Jews). That was their ministry, their special calling and they were sent out by the early church on this basis. Acts 13.2-3: '*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas*

and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.' So you may well have a specific calling (to gangs, hip hop culture, young people, old people, homeless people etc.) Also note that the place of prayer and fasting played an important part in determining what role they were to have. See also Romans 1.1-3.

So we are to be different, set apart. We don't behave like the world, we don't do the things others do, we don't have the same priorities. The Bible tells us to have 'the mind of Christ' - in 1 Corinthians 2.16 it says this: 'For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.' So if we are to be set apart, think different (as the old Apple logo said) then we must look at the witness of Christ and follow his example.

Appointed as prophet to the nations

1 Corinthians 14.1-3 says - 'Love should be your guide. Be eager to have the gifts that come from the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy. If you speak languages that others don't know, God will understand what you are saying, though no one else will know what you mean. You will be talking about mysteries that only the Spirit understands. But when you prophesy, you will be understood, and others will be helped. They will be encouraged and made to feel better.'

There is no doubt that the place of prophets is still of massive importance. In the Old Testament, God used the prophets to speak to the people. In these days we are all part of God's 'Royal priesthood' (in the holy family of God). But there are still prophets as the New Testament makes clear.

Jeremiah was to be a prophet to the nations. An awesome responsibility and calling. Do you seek to be a prophet? Have you read what the Bible has to say about prophets. It can be summed up in the phrase, 'the world was not worthy of them.' (Hebrews 11.38, talking about men and women of God). But we see the lives of prophets as a very tough one. In fact Elijah became so fed up he asked God to end his life (1 Kings 19.4) Ever felt this way - or felt really down? Many people in the Bible did. Maybe it's a place God brings us to - when he wants to remind us of who he is and how only he can help.

Why is the life of a prophet a tough one? The prophet 'sees' things with spiritual eyes, that perhaps others don't see, don't want to see or aren't capable of seeing - because God reveals it to them. In the case of Elisha, he could see angels where his servant could not - *2 Kings 6: 17, 'And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.'* In the case of Ezekiel, he saw dry bones rise up and become an army. In Jeremiah 1.11-12 we

read this - *'The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" - "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied.'* So Jeremiah also saw things not seen in the natural.

God specifically said to Jeremiah, "I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Maybe God is saying to you now that he is calling you to be a prophet. Take a look at the lives of prophets and see how they operate. Do you have visions? Understand things? Maybe feel God regularly give you (accurate) words for other people? Do you have insight into situations that are beyond your understanding? Are you very visual? Do you like to shape and create? Pray with someone you trust and ask God to reveal to you if you are being called by God as a prophet.

It's an exciting calling, but it's also very hard. I know. Be aware that being a prophet brings a great responsibility (to reflect what God says, not what you say). You will also face abuse, discouragement, people refusing to listen. But hear me. Those that do listen to the prophets, the visionaries, will move forward into their Christian lives. Cities, churches, ministries that refuse to listen to the prophetic will stall, stay the same, not move forward, even die. Don't believe me? Take a look in the Old Testament at where the people refused to listen to the prophets..

Jeremiah has doubts 1

Jeremiah 1.6-7, "Ah, Sovereign LORD , " I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

We can also see parallel in 1 Kings 3.7 with David and his doubts when God spoke to him - and Moses in Exodus chapters 3 and 4 where he also doubted ([click here for our talk on Moses and his doubts](#)). It is OK to doubt and to question. It is human to doubt, to question, to not understand. In Isaiah 55:9 it says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." So we know from the Bible that God's ways are higher than ours. The opposite must be true - our ways are lower than God's ways. In this context 'higher' means 'much greater, more understanding, more wisdom' etc. So we know that we don't have the understanding that God has. And we see throughout the Bible that people doubted.

Question:

**So how do we know whether our doubts are right or not?
Another question - how do we know that it is God speaking to us and not our own minds or perhaps the voice of satan trying to put us off or discourage us? Answers on paper and feedback..**

- God speaks to us from the Bible. We read the Bible, open our hearts to God, let and expect the Holy Spirit to speak to us. A Bible verses seems to 'jump out' off the page and we may read it and re-read it, amazed at how it applies to our situation.
- Someone you respect who is Godly (young or old) and tells you that they think you should do something, or that you have a gift somewhere. You need to test this as it's not always accurate. But test it, try it. If lots of people say the same kinds of things independently, think even harder!
- By doing. The simple step of doing something may show you whether it is for you or not. A trial, a test, a month doing youth work will help guide you.
- God may well speak to you very directly. You may 'hear' words in your head that seem to come from God, perhaps after praying and waiting on God for an answer.
- A vision or a dream. Recently I had a picture of an old fashioned shoe shop. There were loads of boxes piled on top of each other, all with different shoes in. Someone reached up and pulled out a box about 3/4 of the way up in the middle. I believe that was God speaking. I believe he said there are many options available to me, some options are easier to 'reach' than others. But the shoe box has to be taken off the shelf and opened. Each pair of trainers (sneakers) in there is different, has a different style and colour. Maybe God speaks to you in similar ways.
- God may well speak in unexpected ways, from unexpected places - like reading a book, watching a movie etc. God is highly creative and engages with you as you think.

Jeremiah has doubts 2

So Jeremiah doubted. But what did God do? God had an answer. For every one of your doubts, God has an answer and we are to act on this answer. Once God has spoken we must try to take this into our lives and make it work, with God's help.

Imagine a soccer team. The manager comes to a player and says, 'I want you to play up front, I think you're good there.' The player is unsure as he normally plays on the wing but he hears what the manager says and despite probable uncertainty, he gives it a go. He trusts the manager and acts on what he says. The player's name? Thierry Henri.

God said to Jeremiah, go everywhere I send you and speak exactly what I tell you to. This was going to be a massive challenge. God knew this so he reassured Jeremiah by saying, don't worry, I will be with you all of the time, don't be afraid cos I will rescue you. Like many of us,

Jeremiah had fear. But God rescues his people. He did it with Jesus and he does it every day. Not always in the ways we understand but God is faithful. He was to Jeremiah and he will be with you.

The Lord touched Jeremiah's mouth

Jeremiah 1.9-10, 'Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." '

Need any evidence that God rescues, helps us. Read verse 9. 'God reached out his hand..' This reminds me of those rescue stories on TV when people are being swept away in waves and the rescuers or firemen reach out a hand, a branch, a dinghy, a rope - and save the person's life. This alone is a picture of God at work in our world and our lives. God did this with Jesus. Jesus voluntarily came to earth. God didn't say, 'right, if you want to be a child of God, you have to pop up to heaven and get an ID card.' No, he sent Jesus. Jesus came down to earth. God reached out to us, though we are messed up and don't deserve it. Jesus reached out to Peter when he stepped out of the boat and started sinking (Matthew 14:29-31).

God touched Jeremiah's mouth. Let's look at some other parallels in the Bible to help us explain this. Can anyone think of anywhere else this kind of thing happens in the Bible?

Isaiah 6.6-7 - One of the flaming creatures flew over to me with a burning coal that it had taken from the altar with a pair of metal tongs. It touched my lips with the hot coal and said, "This has touched your lips. Your sins are forgiven, and you are no longer guilty."

Psalms 81:9-11 - You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not bow down to an alien god. I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

So, 2 different verses. In groups, deconstruct (take these verses apart, break them down) and assess what they mean.. This will help us understand Jeremiah.

Isaiah - a burning hot coal that came from the altar (the place of worship) and touched Isaiah's lips. This to me symbolizes God's holiness (consuming fire). When God meets with us in his kindness and touches our lives, we are touched by something very holy, very awesome and powerful. For Isaiah, this happened in response to him seeing the Lord all-powerful. When he saw this, he fell on his face and he became aware of his sin. This is a picture of us if we accept Jesus - and our rightful response to God revealing his holiness to us - called worship. God forgave Isaiah's sins, he was no longer guilty. If we accept Jesus, the same can be true for us.

Psalm 81 - The key phrase here is 'open your mouth and I will fill it.' If you have a drink and open your mouth a little bit and take ickle sips, y'all ain't gonna get your thirst filled very quickly. If you get yourself a pint of water, open wide and guzzle it down then you'll satisfy your thirst more quickly. It depends what you want from God but the wider you open your mouth, the more that God can pour in - the more of your life you give (submit) to Jesus, the more he will use you.

What God did for Jeremiah was put His words in Jeremiah's mouth. We should seek the same, to speak the words of Christ. We often pray for people speaking saying, 'God give them your words not their words, pour into their hearts your heart..' And we expect God to do that. The closer to God we are, the more we will be able to receive this in our lives.

We also see something of the life of a prophet - over nations and kingdoms - to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. Know what? I see twice the amount of hard words in the life of a prophet than I do words of building up. Have you ever been to a conference or a meeting about prophecy? Ever noticed how much of it is to bless people, God's going to give you this, build up this, give you more of this.. I've noticed this but it isn't really Biblical. The prophets mainly had very hard things to say, did some hard things, felt the hurt and pain of a God grieved by human sin. Interesting isn't it. What about you?

The Evidence

Immediately, in verses 11 and following, we find God's promises for Jeremiah being worked out. We are called to make the most of every opportunity (Ephesians 5.16, Colossians 4.5). God is patient - but when he has a plan for your life - in his timing he will 'explode' you into your ministry (just as Joseph became ruler over Egypt in a day from being forgotten in a prison cell).

Be very encouraged today. But if you take one thing away from this, learn to hear the words of the prophetic. It will change your life. It may well save your life and the lives of many others. You'll see what I mean one day in heaven. :-)