

The Call of Jeremiah (New Year's Day)

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[0 : 00] 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 forgive you. As we've entered 2020, this new year, I pray that we've entered this new year with our eyes open, with a sense of realism that, you know, all that we saw last night, all the celebrations, all the excesses, all these things can't, you know, hide.

And certainly for the church, certainly for God's people, we enter 2020, not with any kind of false optimism. And I say with care, but I think we have to say this realistically, not with any plea that somehow the Lord is going to make this year easier, but that we go into this new year with the Lord our God, that He leads us and leads you, that He guides us and guides you, that He strengthens you for the battle ahead, because there is that battle ahead, the challenges that we will all face in this year.

We are engaged and will be engaged again in spiritual warfare, that under God's providence, He will permit His people to enter into.

And to help you and to help us, to equip us for what lies ahead, then I believe that what we find here in chapter 1 in the call of Jeremiah to be that prophet of God in the land of Judah, that what we read here in encouragement is applicable to ourselves in 2020 as it was when Jeremiah was given that call.

[2 : 11] I mean, Jeremiah was given a call to be a prophet, to be a prophet amongst a rebellious people, the people of Judah, the southern kingdom. As we would have noticed as we read chapter 1, Jeremiah was given this call as a young man, a young prophet, humanly speaking, for most of his ministry, not all of it, but for most of it, he was on his own, and he was going to have to contend with us.

We saw there kings, officials, priests, the people who were almost wholly against him. But he would go, as we go, as you go, in strength of God the Lord.

He would go into a situation, as we often go into a situation, even this year that's begun, into what might appear to be a hopeless, desperate, dark situation, even in our national life.

And yet, as Jeremiah was called, as he was appointed by God, to undertake a particular work in God's care and God's service. So, it's for you, it's for me, to listen to the call of God, to go into the world, to do as God has given you to do, and to do it with that courage, that boldness, with the enabling hand of God upon you.

And I pray then that the service is a service of encouragement, because most here, I know, most go into this new year aware that we go into a world, with a world view, that's anti-Christian.

[3 : 50] We know, we see it, even almost the first few minutes of the new year, there's always something to antagonise Christians, a collective opposition to the truth, to the gospel.

And, you may well feel alone. In your home circumstances, perhaps you might feel alone. Maybe in the street that you live in, the community that you engage with, the place that you work in.

But take courage. Take courage. On Sunday evening, when John Angus was preaching, we were encouraged to change the, as it were, the I can't to I can.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And I pray that, you know, we take that word, the true word of God with us as we go, not alone, but that we go into this new year with our Lord and Saviour.

And, as I say, we're focusing particularly on this call of Jeremiah, that Jeremiah was giving us, a prophet, to proclaim the word of God. And something perhaps we don't think of very often, hardly ever often, I suppose.

[5 : 02] You know, we talk about the priesthood of believers. You know, that Christians are, as priests before God, that we serve them, as priests serve them. We offer sacrifice, the sacrifice of our hearts.

We offer ourselves in his care and keeping. But I wonder if we ever thought about the prophethood of believers. believers, the prophethood of believers.

In other words, that you, who know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, you have a work to do to foretell the Gospel. As prophets, you know, in Scripture, foretold, told forth the Word of God.

And believers, Christians, have that prophetic role. Not any sort of, you know, as Jeremiah would, you know, look into the future and through a divine inspiration given to what was about to come.

No, not in that sense. But we are to foretell, tell forth. We're to speak forth the Word of God. And as we see here the message that Jeremiah was given as prophet, then this message that Jeremiah was given is applicable to you who have been given that prophetic role to tell forth, to speak forth, and to lift the Word before others.

[6 : 24] So, let's look at this call of Jeremiah. There's a lot in the first 16 verses. We're going to try and summarize it very, very briefly. I mean, for example, we can even begin at verse 10 where we see that Jeremiah has been given this direct call from God.

He's been called to speak forth God's Word, to speak that Word to the, we're told, the kingdoms, the nations. He's young, he's experienced in the work that God's given him, but God, as we're told here, God has touched his mouth.

God's going to give him the words to speak. God's going to equip him. And not only in his native Judah, but to the surrounding nations. So, if you like, Jeremiah has this international remit.

And it's a challenging remit. It's a challenging task. As God says to him in verse 10, he's going to pluck up and break down. He's going to destroy and overthrow.

He's going to build and to plant. If you look at that carefully, there's a negative and there's a positive. This negative, this plucking up, this breaking down, this destroying, this overthrowing.

[7 : 33] In other words, the work that God's going to give Jeremiah to do is going to be hard work. There's going to be a purging of the land through the Word of God.

I mean, figuratively speaking, you know, this plucking up, you get the sense of that field, vast field, we might say fields of rebellion. And they're going to have to be cleared of the thorns and the weeds of national sin for the land to be purified, for the true crop of God's Word to take root once more in the land.

And we're told, too, there's going to be destruction. Obviously, there's these structures in Judah that have stood against God, the structure of the mind against God, the heart against God.

And if the land's going to be reconstructed, there's going to have to be destruction, getting rid of all that has opposed God and His Word. So even these very verbs that God uses here, pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow, that suggests hard work.

That suggests labor. It suggests strength. It suggests strength. And Jeremiah is going to go into this situation.

[8 : 50] He's going to go into, if you like, the epicenter where the storm is. He's going to speak God's Word, the Word alone that has that power to pluck up and break down and destroy and overthrow and, yes, build and plant.

And don't we live in a similar society? Don't we live in a similar world where there's so many weeds and thorns and godless structures that prevail, the structures of an anti-Christian worldview that predominates, the structure of laws and practices that fly in the face of the Word of God?

But God is calling us people in 2020. God's calling you, God's calling the prophethood of God to pluck up and break down to destroy and to overthrow and to build and to plant.

What does that mean? What does it mean in practice? It means going into the world. It means taking your stand for the truth where God sends you to take that stand for truth.

and we pray that, you know, that 2020 that we'll see these structures that seem so impregnable, that we'll see these structures destroyed and that God will send his people, even send you into the world and to challenge these so firmly held systems and practices that might appear to be stronger and stronger each year, but we don't despair as we heard in prayer.

[10:30] We don't despair. I mean, Jeremiah was called not to despair and likewise we're not to despair because, again, jumping about in the passage here but you go back to verse 8, the first time that Jeremiah has been told, commanded, don't be afraid of them because we're told God's going to be with you.

God's put his word in Jeremiah's mouth. You see there in verse 9, God sent him over the nations to do the work, that work of destruction and construction. God's not a deceiver.

God's not deceiving Jeremiah to thinking that, you know, the work that God has for him is somehow going to be easy. Proclaiming God's word is difficult enough before a people that have lost their way spiritually.

That in itself is difficult enough. But then we're told that there's judgment coming in the land of Judah. God's going to unleash armies from the north as we know from later in Jeremiah it's the Babylonian army.

And the army is going to fight against Judah because God's using the Babylonians in judgment because the people of Judah, God's people have turned from God, turned their hearts away from God.

[11:52] They've forsaken the one true God. And Jeremiah is not unprepared for this calamity that we see there in verse 17. Really, if you like, the focus very much of her thoughts this morning.

Dress for work. Dress for work. I mean, the old version says, gird up your loins. And what's the idea there?

The idea is that certainly these days if you were to be mobile, functional, then you'd tuck your long robe under your belt so that you're able to move more easily.

And in the work that God had given Jeremiah to do. In other words, it's not to be hindered, not to be hindered by anything that's going to prevent a full involvement in his prophetic work of speaking to the people, of speaking God's judgment from the people.

He's to be prepared for that work. He's to be fully functional, nothing hindering him. And, you know, for Christians this year, this new year, we are to be fully prepared for the work that God's given you to do.

[13:07] And not to be tangled up in the world that so hampers your witness. I mean, even now in this New Year's Day service, use this opportunity to be prepared.

You know, have that resolution, as we were, again, we're hearing on Sunday evening, have that resolution to know God more. Get to know God more this year. And in knowing God more, get to know the world less.

And be prepared for the battles that lie ahead. and therefore be dressed appropriately. In other words, know that God has given you work to do.

And in that, being prepared and being dressed appropriately, put on the whole armour of God. You know, in Ephesians 6, that Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, the armour that equips the Christian for the struggle that the Christian's involved in, the spiritual warfare, armour that God gives you to endure and to know the victory in Christ, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the readiness given by the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, as Paul says, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

And certainly Jeremiah was to use the sword of the spirit, he was to use the word of God as God would enable him to go into that place of confrontation with the enemies of God and his people.

[14:55] God equipping as God equips you, as God gives you that which you need for his service. And then as we see God promising there in verse 17, arise and say to them, everything that I command you, everything, not leaving anything out, given the full counsel of God's word.

And, you know, when we see how God's equipping Jeremiah, it's so clear, it's so clear. I mean, Jeremiah's told, don't be afraid of the people, don't be dismayed by them.

I mean, this is the second time God has actually said this to Jeremiah. We saw that in verse 8, we're seeing this again towards the end of the chapter.

As I suggest, the very fact that Jeremiah is told twice not to be afraid of the people tells us that he actually was afraid, that he needed God's encouragement, God's strengthening.

And, you know, it's fascinating the number of times in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see God saying to his servants, fear not, don't be afraid, don't be afraid of man, don't be afraid of others and the mission that I'm sending you on.

[16:18] As there is, as you know, as I know, fear of man, fear of others, even fear of self. But when we do fear, as Jeremiah was prone, certainly initially anyway, to be afraid, then God's word comes to us.

God's word comes to you and assures you, don't be afraid. Why? Because God is with you. And when you, as a man or a woman of God, when you rely wholly on the word of God, then you're echoing what we read in Psalm 118, the Lord is on my side, I will not fear.

Just take that to heart, the Lord is on my side. We deserve nothing of the Lord being on our side. Absolutely nothing. But the Lord is on my side, I will not fear.

What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper. I shall look and triumph on those who hate me. Certainly Jeremiah did look and triumph on those who hated him.

But note this too, God has given Jeremiah this assurance that he's with him, not to be afraid. And then note this in verse 18, Jeremiah is given the protection of God.

[17:32] And notice that the way that this is described, a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls. In other words, God's saying to Jeremiah, I'm strengthening you.

You've got tough tasks ahead of you, but I'm giving you that strength to accomplish these tasks.

You're going to proclaim judgment on the people. You're going to need strength to do so.

And so God's saying you're going to be, from now on you're going to be a fortified city. In other words, you're not going to be broken down. You know in sieges that long ago when a city was besieged, very often the walls were broken down and then the besiegers were getting to the city.

But Jeremiah has been assured that he is a fortified city that will not be broken down. He's not going to be defeated. He's going to be given that strength to withstand all the pressures that God's opponents will place in Jeremiah.

Yes, Jeremiah is going to be attacked like a fortified city, but the enemies of God won't prevail. He's going to be an iron pillar.

[18:43] He's going to be bronze walls. In other words, God's given him the strength to be rigid, to be immovable, and not easily shattered.

again, you see the senses and strength, and that strength that comes not from himself, but from the God of power. Face this mighty opposition.

I mean, look at those whom Jeremiah is going to have to face. Kings and priests, those who are at the highest level of society, and then right down to the ordinary people.

But God's going to protect him. God's going to strengthen him. And again, I refer to what we were hearing on Sunday evening, and that truth of God strengthening his people.

God's strengthening you to enable you, yes, to take your stand against the devil and his schemes, and to say with confidence that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

[19:45] Maybe if you've looked back in 2019, you've maybe seen your faith was weak. Maybe you were all too prone to say even last year, I can't when you've taken your eyes off your Saviour, of Jesus.

When you forgot the one who's promised to be with you always, even to the very end of the age. And instead, you've taken your eyes off him because he who is great, the one who's in you is greater than the one who's in the world.

And so be encouraged in this year that's begun, because God has given you that strength, that enabling, and he's done so in love. And he will enable you to fight that good fight of faith.

He's given you the weapons to fight, the weapons of his word, the weapons of his love, the weapons of his grace, the weapons of his truth. And I pray that you will be able to echo the word that we sang in Psalm 18.

For who is God but the Lord? And who is a rock except our God? The God who equips me with strength and makes my way blameless? For you equipped me with strength for the battle.

[21:10] You made those who rise against me sink under me. It is a battle. There's a battle in spiritual warfare. You will face that battle this year.

Don't bury your head in the sand and say it's not going to happen. No, if you're a Christian you've been given that work to do that will involve that warfare. In fact, this year may well even be more difficult than last year in many ways because we know the devil does go around like a prowling lion seeking tumult devour.

The forces of evil are active, very active against the Lord's people. And certainly Jeremiah was under no illusion about that battle that lay ahead as God said to him in verse 19, they will fight

against you.

Who are they? The whole spectrum of God's enemies. The many, the many will fight against you Jeremiah. But God says and God promises they will not prevail.

2020 marks the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. And if you've done your Second World War history, you'll know that the RAF was numerically much weaker than the German Luftwaffe.

[22 : 26] In 1940, the RAF successfully withstood the might of the Luftwaffe. And yes, many parts of the country were bombed, devastated.

but the planned invasion of Britain never happened, other than Channel Islands, but certainly mainland Britain was never invaded because the few, as Churchill referred to the RAF, the few withstood the many and gained the victory.

And in 2020, the few will withstand the many. They will fight against you. The many, yes, even in our own land, even in the land of Scotland.

I don't know what the statistics are, but various numbers are banded about. 90, 90% of people in the country will be anywhere but a place of worship on the Lord's Day.

A small percentage of people, even in 2020, worshipping God, even this coming Lord's Day. And you translate that into, you know, your everyday life, every area of your life.

[23 : 40] Just think of the street that you live in. How many are going to be in the Lord's day in a place of worship where God's word is proclaimed faithfully?

Maybe you're the only one in your family who follows the Lord Jesus. Maybe you work, you have very few Christians. Maybe you're the only one who follows the Savior.

Or else think in a bigger picture, think of our governments, whether it be in Holyrood or in Westminster. How many Christian MPs, how many Christian MSPs are there? There are some, most parties, not all parties, but most parties, but there's still a handful, a small number.

The many will fight against the few. But be assured, as Jeremiah was assured here, they will fight against you, but they will not prevail. They will fight against you, but they will not prevail.

The gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Why? Well, as God says to Jeremiah here, as we've been saying and keep saying, and must keep saying, for I am with you to deliver you, I am with you to rescue you.

[24 : 55] You see, it's not just Jeremiah who had to face a hostile people. It's not just Jeremiah who had to face people who wanted things their own way and leave God and his word out of the picture.

It's not just Jeremiah who faced a people who scoffed at God and you. It's you. It's you who followed the Lord Jesus.

You are facing and will face that hostile world. You'll face people who scoff at you and mock you for being a Christian. Remember, God is with you and to deliver you and to rescue you.

He's with you. Even as we've begun this new year, he's promised never to leave you. And these aren't just nice-sounding words, some sort of anaesthetic to somehow dull your mind, dull your heart.

No, these are words of truth. we've entered 2020. I pray that you can say hitherto up to now, the Lord helped us, the Lord blessed us.

[26 : 10] And that you can say just as God has been with me in the past, so you'll be with me in this year that's begun. You know, in Jeremiah's ministry, he was attacked many times, faced many, many battles, even battles from within his own hometown of Anathoth, even from his own people, even at one point being thrown in a bottle dungeon and just left to die.

But God rescued him, God delivered him, God saved him. When the Babylonians did come to attack Jerusalem, they inflicted severe, severe destruction on the city, slaughtered so many people. But Jeremiah was rescued. Jeremiah was rescued. You go to chapter 39, King Nebuchadnezzar actually said to his people of Jeremiah, look after him, look after him.

And God will look after you this year. We pray that that will be known and thanked for, God will protect you from the mouths of the lions that seek to tear you apart, that seek to tear the church apart.

It may sound a cliché, but it's true, one plus God is a majority. Maybe you're facing this year with some kind of trepidation, but trust in the Lord.

[27 : 44] Trust in him whose presence goes before you, whose presence is with you, as it was for Jeremiah. Because God is faithful.

God's not going to turn his back on the promises that he's made for you, before you. So trust him, rely on him, rely on him for the strength that you need for this year.

And I pray then that God will bless you as you trust in him, that God will keep you whose mind is stayed and him, and that his love will surround you.

In this year of our Lord 2020, we go into this year with him, before us, and with us, and in us, and for us.

And yes, you'll know these words that are words of reality. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you.

[28 : 48] May God add his blessing to his word. Let's close then in Psalm 90, on page 120.

Psalm 90, on page 120. We'll sing from verse 10, down to verse 17. 10 to 17, to God's words, please.

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