

<b>Series:</b> Jeremiah: Faith During Opposition	<b>Reference:</b> Jeremiah 1:4-19	<b>Title:</b> Strength & Skill - Power & Presence	<b>Date:</b> 08.08.2021
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
We begin this series looking at the overwhelming call of Jeremiah to take God's word to rebellious people of God, and the nations beyond them. Jeremiah will find that he's totally inadequate to the task, but that God's power & presence will enable him! Amen!			

**COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES**

Open your Pew Bibles to p515, Jeremiah 1, and hold your place there... In these difficult times, many Christians are falling away from the faith due to social pressure. Or worse, some reinterpret Scripture to shoehorn personal desire to fit into it. At best they're deceived, at worst, they've become apostates. Alissa Childers in *Another Gospel* says, "In progressive Christianity, doubt has become a badge of honor to bask in, rather than an obstacle to face & overcome."<sup>1</sup>

Understandable *doubt* has morphed into prideful *unbelief* leading people to live as if God doesn't exist. They deconstruct Scripture with impossible intellectual gymnastics, devastating their faith & that of others. Scriptural veracity's questioned, although the Hebrew & New Testament texts were accepted as Scripture by the majority of Christians by the end of the first century. The Councils which met in the 4th or 5th centuries weren't to *choose* which books *should* be in the Bible, they were *confirming* what the church already *agreed upon* as Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Within the New Testament itself, Paul quotes Luke's gospel calling it Scripture (1 Timothy 5:18). And, Peter refers to all of Paul's letters as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16).<sup>3</sup>

In the earliest creeds, we hear them say, "According to the Scriptures..." Belief was inextricably linked to Scripture. Progressive Christianity believes the writers of the Bible wrote what they 'believed to be true of God in their time & place', but that we moderns have progressed beyond. That's not what the Scriptures teach. It states, this is God's Word conveyed through human personalities in the context of history. There's a difference in progressing in understanding of Scripture, opposed to beyond them. Progressives, like Brian McLaren, say lofty things like we have 'a higher & wiser view of God now.' He & others open the door for people to pick & choose what we think is true from the Scriptures, but leave the rest.<sup>4</sup>

Christianity's clear & evidentially solid. In one of the earliest creeds found in 1 Co 15 solid belief's defined. Liberal & conservative scholars alike, believe it was written within months to a few years of Jesus ascension. It's irresponsible to put the Scriptures under scrutiny when it's so solid evidentially, but some do & it's done damage...

<sup>1</sup> Another Gospel, Alissa Childers, p52

<sup>2</sup> Another Gospel, Alissa Childers, p37

<sup>3</sup> Another Gospel, Alissa Childers, p39

<sup>4</sup> Alissa Childers, [The Difference Between Progressive & Historical Christianity](#).

Former worship leader, Michael Gungor, recently wandered off the theological ranch when he tweeted, *“Jesus was Christ. Buddha was Christ. Muhammad was Christ. Christ is a word for the Universe seeing itself. You are Christ. We are the body of Christ.”* Foolish damaging words of a prideful young man. Concerning America, one article says, “...data indicates a stabilized increase in the number of those who no longer identify as religious at all.” Social media’s replete with verbal grenades lobbed at historic Christian conviction.

The culture war’s lost & has had casualties. The fight is hard & will be harder still for those grasping at a corner of Jesus’ cloak. Most Christian defection from orthodoxy’s due to fatigue of defending the faith, or maybe the fear of man. Alissa Childers tells a story of a friend who chose to embrace a lifestyle contradictory to Christian conviction, despite her long history of orthodoxy on the subject. Alissa asked her, *“Would you say that you truly believe this is God’s will for your life...or are you just tired of fighting?”* Her friend responded, *“I’m tired of fighting.”*<sup>5</sup> The door of desire, personal choice & pleasure has swung wide open, anything goes.

Will we hold onto the faith in the midst of opposition from without, or from personal desire within? There are times in history where we must draw lines, this is one. Boundaries with others & for ourselves. But boundaries must be defended in love, without compromise to truth. Because truth without love kills, love without truth lies.

Over the next 5 weeks we’re going to be asking questions such as...how can we remain faithful to God when many people around us aren’t? How can we share the gospel in the face of opposition? We’ll explore the life & ministry of Jeremiah whose ministry was characterized by opposition, suffering & a message people *didn’t* want to hear as they’d deviated from their missional call. What can we learn from his journey & the message God gave that rebellious people? We’ll look at how Jeremiah displays the necessity of deep faith & engagement with a world in need of it. *Fulfilling our calling isn’t dependent on our strength & skill, but on God’s power & presence with us.*

*Imposter Syndrome’s* the fear of being secretly inadequate at your job. Some fear having people discover, we aren’t as capable or talented as they think. Which may be just insecurity. Let’s listen to this conversation between God & Jeremiah in 1:4-19...<sup>4</sup>*The word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>5</sup>“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”*

The word ‘knew’ (yāda’) here is of the most intimate kind, used to describe intimate relations of a husband & wife, or close personal relationship. The word ‘set apart’ (qādaš) describes a special purpose. It’s used for the priesthood, items in the Tabernacle/Temple & for the Sabbath. Jeremiah was set apart for a special purpose, born from a deep intimacy with God to be a prophet to the nations! It’s fitting that we

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<sup>5</sup> <sup>5</sup> Another Gospel, Alissa Childers, p52

just ended our *Desire Overflow* series, this is the same idea, overflow of God's presence from us in our calling to reach the nations!

It continues in v6...<sup>6</sup>*"Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."* Our series graphic depicts an older later version of Jeremiah who's ministry lasted at least 41 years! At the time of his calling he's probably in his late teens, maybe early twenties - young, ineloquent & inexperienced, with every reason to feel inadequate for this task! What if he'd succumbed to this insecurity & said no to God's calling?

Bruce Olson, later known as Bruchko, felt the call of God to go into the jungles of Columbia & Venezuela alone at 19. Arriving with only \$70 in his pocket, Bruce wanted to bring the Gospel to the Motilone, a violent murderous tribe who'd killed or wounded over 500 oil company employees! In his first encounter they shot him in the leg with a poison arrow, drug him back to camp to kill him, but the chief spared him. They shut him in a hot hut for days with a swollen infected leg feeding him worms & bananas. After years of disease, torture, misfortune & simple hard work he saw them come to Jesus! What if he'd succumbed to insecurity?

God answers Jeremiah's insecurity in v7...<sup>7</sup>*But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to & say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup>Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you & will rescue you," declares the Lord.* We'd feel the same as Jeremiah, but unlike the truly skilled with *Imposter Syndrome*, Jeremiah isn't mistaken about his condition. This calling far exceeds his age & ability, but God doesn't coddle insecurity, "Jeremiah! You're not young, you do know how to speak! You're capable, you can do this! I believe in you!" That may've been encouraging to hear, but it wouldn't have been true!

Instead, God directs him not to focus on inadequacies (v. 7), or to be afraid. But how? The answer's found in v8, God says...*"I am with you & will rescue you."* God doesn't stroke fears of inadequacy with reassurances of *our* strength & skill, instead He reminds us of *His Power & Presence*. When we're called to speak into a culture increasingly hostile to God's message, we should know, we're not up to the task, but God is!

My weekly preaching isn't something I take lightly. Like Jeremiah, I'm inadequate. But, ours isn't to create the message, a pastor's not a chef, but a waiter. We serve it up, being given the Word & the power of God's presence to share it effectively. It continues in V9...<sup>9</sup>*Then the Lord reached out his hand & touched my mouth & said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup>See, today I appoint you over nations & kingdoms to uproot & tear down, to destroy & overthrow, to build & to plant."* God gave Jeremiah 3 answers to his objections. Firstly, He stressed the authority under which Jeremiah would act. He'd have no choice as to audience or message. He's to go to everyone God sends him & say whatever God commands. Jeremiah was to be simply a faithful messenger.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Charles H. Dyer, "[Jeremiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1130.

Notice too, part of his message is unwelcome. Building & planting is nice, but uprooting, tearing down, destruction & overthrow aren't! Our task is sometimes one of deconstructing thoughts antithetical to God. In issues detrimental to people, but to which they hold so dear, we can't deny our calling to confront with God's Word.

Scriptures teaches in 2 Co 2:15–16...<sup>15</sup>*For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved & those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup>To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?* We certainly aren't except for in God's powerful presence & Word!

**Secondly, God says He'd protect Jeremiah since people will seek to harm him.** And thirdly, God showed him the source of the message. The Lord touched Jeremiah's mouth, a visible manifestation confirming the Lord would fill him. Jeremiah needn't worry what to say, God would provide!<sup>7</sup> We have greater benefit, filled with the Spirit leading into all truth, the Word of God at our fingertips & Jesus' promise of presence in the Great Commission. Amply prepared, not in our own strength & skill, but in the power & presence of Christ!

Jesus encourages us in Luke 12:11-12...*“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers & authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, <sup>12</sup>for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”*

And the same sobering message in 21:13-19...*you will bear testimony to me. <sup>14</sup>But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. <sup>15</sup>For I will give you words & wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. <sup>16</sup>You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers & sisters, relatives & friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup>Everyone will hate you because of me. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>Stand firm, and you will win life.*

None of us can answer every question posed, but we have what we need to be effective & adequate in our calling! Many times we try with our own words to argue people into the Kingdom, but just simply getting people to read the Bible has great power. One of the prisoners in our prison ministry recently reacted to a verse in our study saying, “I'm realizing how powerful God's words are!”

GK Chesterton said, *“Fairy tales are more than true – not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten.”* Even fiction's powerful to encourage since it speaks to the human condition. But the living Word of God in the pages of Scripture doesn't just teach good lessons & encourage hearts, it's powerful to the salvation of souls like nothing else! As Romans 10:17 says... *faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

Bruchko won the Motilone to Christ, not because he was so eloquent, educated, or even tenacious. Rather, one day they saw him reading the Bible & equated the pages with

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<sup>7</sup> Charles H. Dyer, “[Jeremiah](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1130.

banana leaves in an ancient prophesy from their own history which said a man would come & show them God by reading words on bananas leaves! It was when they began to hear the Word spoken that conviction & conversion occurred! God is great!

Jeremiah's calling had recipient & method. Sent on mission with God's Word which would bring an end to what seemed absolute & bring about the impossible. Things in our culture antithetical to God seem so absolute! And they are too much for us to overcome in our own strength! Another great awakening to God won't happen arguing politics on social media. It'll be by the power of God's Presence & Word revealed in the witness of His people! God's Word will dismantle that which seems so absolute & isn't glorifying to Him, and rebuild what seems impossible, His kingdom in it's place!

In vv11–16 the Lord gave Jeremiah two visions to help him see the nature of his calling & effectiveness. The first deals with the time of judgment & the second with the direction & nature of it. Beginning in V11...<sup>11</sup>*The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied. <sup>12</sup>The Lord said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."*

We've studied hard over this past year God's calling of His people from cover to cover in the Bible. God won't let up on it. Will we engage in His Kingdom building drawing power from His promised presence? Or allow difficulties & fatigue to dishearten? The Hebrew word for 'almond tree' used here (šāqēd) is from the word 'to watch or wake' (šāqad). The almond tree was named the 'awake tree' because, in Palestine, it's the first tree in the year to bud & bear fruit. Bloom precedes leaf as the tree blossoms in late January.<sup>8</sup> God's using that imagery to say He's awake & watching to see His Word fulfilled for sure!

Now a 2<sup>nd</sup> vision in v13...<sup>13</sup>*The word of the Lord came to me again: "What do you see?" "I see a pot that is boiling," I answered. "It is tilting toward us from the north."<sup>14</sup>The Lord said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. <sup>15</sup>I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the Lord. "Their kings will come & set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls & against all the towns of Judah. <sup>16</sup>I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods & in worshiping what their hands have made.*

I hope you remember what we studied in recent past? **That is, if you don't do Acts 1:8 (But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea & Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.), you'll get Acs 8:1 (On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea & Samaria.)** This is what God directs Jeremiah to tell his people! They'd forsaken God's calling to be a light to the nations, now there's a reckoning, as it references the coming invasion of

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<sup>8</sup> Charles H. Dyer, "[Jeremiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1131.

Babylon & her allies (cf. 25:8–9). Though Babylon was located to the *east*, the invading armies followed trade routes along the Euphrates River to Judah. Thus those armies approached from the *north*.<sup>9</sup> A prophecy fulfilled in Jer 39:2-3. Could the church in America expect the same? God may possibly wake us up in similar ways!

Then God directs him further...<sup>17</sup>“*Get yourself ready! Stand up & say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.*”<sup>18</sup>Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar & a bronze wall to stand against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests & the people of the land.<sup>19</sup>They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you & will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

Some athletes have bizarre pre-game rituals. During the 1998 World Cup, the French team believed their winning streak was tied to one player kissing another’s shaved head before each game.<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah had to prepare differently. He’s commanded to get himself ready for the challenges he’ll face. To do so, God says, “Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.” There’s no better solution to the fear of man than a healthy fear of God. If we don’t trust God’s all-powerful & has called us to proclaim truth & will ultimately rescue us, we’ll be swayed by fear. God makes it clear to fear & recognize Him as the ultimate source of power & strength.

He doesn’t promise Jeremiah they’ll listen, or it’ll be easy - success, as we’d expect. Rather, incredible opposition, not exactly a dream job. One career website compiled a list of the worst jobs based on various factors.<sup>11</sup> Assembly workers, bank tellers, short-order cooks & reporters. None of these advertise themselves as negatively as God openly admits Jeremiah’s job will be. The difficulty is the reason the promise “I am with you & will rescue you,” is so important. And reminiscent of Moses’s calling in Exodus 3, where he says to God, “*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh & bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*” (v. 11), God also didn’t affirm Moses’ adequacy. He ignores the question & responds, “I will be with you” (v. 12). Like Moses, Jeremiah is to repeatedly tell his people things they don’t want to hear. Both these men responded with claims of inadequacy, but God insists they don’t need the skills they lack, because God’s enough.

The same’s true of us, sometimes we want people to respond to our feelings of inadequacy by affirming, we’re so gifted & able! Rather, we need to be reminded of God’s call, power & presence. God knew us too before we were in the womb, has empowered us with the Spirit & called us to the same task to speak His Word to the nations which are in need of it! **Let us not be afraid, and serve up the Word of God to the world around us with boldness & clarity even in the face of opposition, knowing God is at work, even when it may not seem that way! We’re called to speak into a culture**

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<sup>9</sup> Charles H. Dyer, “[Jeremiah](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1131

<sup>10</sup> (Sarah Eberspacher, “7 Bizarre Pre-game Rituals from around the World, September 2, 2013, <http://theweek.com/articles/460547/7-bizarre-pregame-rituals-from-around-world>)

<sup>11</sup> (<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/worst-jobs-in-america-4136433>)

increasingly hostile to God's message, even in all our strength & skill we're not up to the task, but God's power & presence is!