

(Jeremiah 1:1-10) My heart's desire and prayer to God is that he might pour out his Spirit upon the laity of this church in great awakening power and unprecedented passion for ministry and love for people dying without Christ, and for the sake of whole peoples who have never heard the great gospel that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And to that end I have been preaching to older and younger alike to inspire you to seek the kingdom first and make ministry the goal of your life.

Once more I want to focus on the younger end of the spectrum and simply let Jeremiah express the kind of hindrances there are to ministry for the young and let God give his three answers to inspire and encourage us all.

Jeremiah 1:6 gives Jeremiah's response to God's call. "Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.'" He feels a sense of incompetency and he says that this incompetency is because he is too young for the job God is calling him to do.

Now, I realize that God is not calling most people in this room to the kind of authoritative prophetic ministry Jeremiah was to have. But I think the principle here will apply to any kind of caring service or outreach or church ministry the Lord is putting in your heart to do. There may be some who say, "I do not have the experience I should," or, "I do not have the maturity needed," or, "I don't yet have the ability needed." But sometimes our perceptions about ourselves are wrong. God sees things we don't see and he creates things in us that we didn't know could be. This doesn't mean that gifts don't count. It means that when the Holy Spirit, ordinarily confirmed by the body of Christ, inclines you to serve people in a certain way, your objections need to be met with the encouraging Word of God.

God gives reasons why Jeremiah's objection shouldn't keep him from following the call. He says in verse 7, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth.'" Do not use your youth as an excuse not to venture something great for God. And here are three reasons for why Jeremiah (and we) should be thrilled and not chilled at the call to serve the Lord. Let's just take them in the order that they come in the conversation between God and Jeremiah.

The first reason Jeremiah should be encouraged to take up the ministry is that his very life is rooted in the unshakable, sovereign purposes of God. Notice the four acts of God surrounding the birth of Jeremiah:

First, God knew him: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." God took Jeremiah into his loving acquaintanceship, he set his caring eye upon him and chose him—that's the biblical idea of God's knowing his people (Amos 3:2). This is true for every child of God according to Romans 8:29.

Second, God consecrated him. God set him apart for some special holy purpose. He destined him for something significant. And that is true for you too. In giving every Christian grace and gifts, God consecrated us to be like Jesus and to use our gifts for his glory.

Third, God formed Jeremiah in the womb. What Jeremiah became though the genetic make up of his mother and his father was no accident. God shaped and designed him in his mother's womb. The Hebrew word (*tsur*) refers to the design of a house or the sculpting of a statue. The "you" that God has to work with today, minus the remnants and

effects of sin, is a "you" that God designed and knows very well. If he calls you to something, it is because the design is right.

Fourth, God appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet. This is why Jeremiah was born. This is his destiny. And you have one too. No Christian exists merely to make an honest living, raise a family, enjoy retirement, and die. Every one of you is called to a ministry.

So the first great incentive to take up our ministry is that our life is rooted in the unshakable, sovereign purposes of God. You are not your own. You are God's. You are not self-made. You are God-made. You did not first choose him. He first chose you. You are not an accident. You are a design. Your life is rooted in God and that is a great source of strength and stability in accepting God's call.

The second reason God gives to young Jeremiah that he should overcome his fearful objection is that God's authority is behind his going and his speaking. The emphasis here is on God's sending where he will, and God's commanding what he wants said. Jeremiah's youth does not matter if he is sent by God's commission and if he is speaking what God commanded.

What all this means for us is this: to the degree that you are led by God into a path of service today, and to the degree that your words conform to what the Bible really teaches, to that degree can you say with Jeremiah: I am not here by my own commission, nor do I speak with my own authority, but I am sent by God and what he commands is what I say. I am humbled by my youth, but I am encouraged that my commission and my word is not my own.

The third reason God gives Jeremiah not to let his youth deter him from ministry is that God will be with him to deliver him. A great obstacle to serving the Lord, especially among the young, is the fear of rejection and opposition. All kinds of thoughts enter the mind about how some people might not like the way I do it. People might disagree or be offended. I might make a mistake and get criticized. The fear of man is a great hindrance to ministry. So God says, Don't fear, because I will be with you and I will deliver you. God's presence and approval is more valuable than all the accolades of men. And God says that in and through all your troubles, I will deliver you. You will triumph in the end. You will be more than a conqueror. And the same thing is promised to all of us in Christ Jesus today.

So God said to Jeremiah, and God says to younger people today whom he is calling to serve him, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth.'" Why? 1. Because your life is rooted in the unshakable, sovereign purposes of God. You have been chosen and consecrated and formed and appointed for a great purpose. 2. Because God's authority, not your own, is behind your going and your speaking. 3. And because God himself will be with you to deliver you in all your trials.

Philip Jacob Spener described beautifully in 1675 what your duty as a Christian means:

Every Christian is bound not only to offer himself and what he has, his prayer, thanksgiving, good works, alms, etc., but also industriously to study in the Word of the Lord, with the grace that is given him to teach others, especially those under his own roof, to chastise, exhort, convert and edify them, to observe their life, pray for all, and

insofar as possible be concerned about their salvation. (*Pia Desideria*, Fortress Press, 1964, p. 94)

Spener is right. There is no question about this. If you are a Christian, The only question is: what form will my ministry take? Is the High Priest, Jesus Christ, leading me to be a lay reader? Is he leading me to nurture the faith of children on Sunday mornings? Is he leading me into a ministry of personal one-to-one discipleship of teenagers or new believers? Is he leading me to train for a lay evangelistic Bible study? Is he leading me to visit the shut-ins? Is my calling a ministry of hospitality, or writing, or mobilizing prayer, or literature distribution, or feeding the hungry, or housing the homeless? That is the question we need to pray about, and so I ask you to seek the Lord afresh about the great privilege of ministering with Jesus Christ.