

We Will Be Amazed
By Reverend Litton Logan
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Scriptures:

¹ The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

⁴ 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."

⁶ Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷ But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD."

⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant." Jeremiah 1:1-10 (NRSV)

Sermon:

Least we limit Jeremiah's call and his prophetic message to just people's religious life let me remind us that in the Ancient Near Eastern world there was no separation of church, state, or economics. So, Jeremiah's prophetic call addressed not only the political and religious leaders of his day but the collective consciousness of a people and how they lived and made a living.

Jeremiah was from a priestly family at Anathoth and himself a member of what we would call the aristocracy. However, scholars tell us that Jeremiah's family had most likely been excluded from priestly services after the Deuteronomistic reforms and centralization of worship in Jerusalem by King Josiah.

Try to imagine if you can, Jeremiah as a young man in his late teens hearing a persistent, inner voice confronting him and calling him to a destiny that he did not want. Talk about annoying solicitation calls.

This inner voice of God tells Jeremiah, have I got a deal for you! Jeremiah, you are one of a very select group of people picked for a wonderful opportunity. It is an offer that will put you

at odds with everyone you know. You will be totally frustrated because people will not listen to you no matter what you do or how hard you try to convince them that how they are living and behaving are wrong. In assuming this divine opportunity, people will beat you, and even attempt to kill you. But, no matter, I will be with you to encourage, strengthen, and deliver you. Such a deal.

I think Jeremiah's call grew in him over the years, culminating in this highly imaginative and stylized event we've heard read today, which is not unlike other prophetic call-stories in the bible. Yet Jeremiah's call was so all consuming, so clear and natural, that it just seemed this was what Jeremiah was born to do and be. Like prophets before him, Jeremiah balked at his call and made excuses - he was too young and people would not take him or his message seriously. God told him that what he was to say would carry God's authority and that authority would make up for what he lacked in age or experience.

Jeremiah's call came at a time when things were looking up for the people of Judah. The Assyrian empire, which had brutally dominated Judah for so long, was in a deep, steady decline and Judah could see on the horizon the possibility of becoming an autonomous nation again. Many of the in-crowd prophets were proclaiming coming days of blessings, wealth, and prosperity like the golden days of King David, and singing "Happy Days are Here Again".

Jeremiah, however, did not join in the optimism of the day. Instead, he talked about another emerging power from the North that was a threat to Judah, especially considering the nation's renewed idolatrous and compromising nationalism.

It also appears that Jeremiah was a bit ambivalent toward King Josiah's Deuteronomic reforms. Nonetheless, as a priest he may have taken on a preaching ministry to popularize the reforms. However, these reforms in Jeremiah's estimation didn't go far enough and didn't sit well with his more integrated sense of God's claim on the national life of Judah.

Jeremiah's sense was that his people and their leaders were becoming morally and spiritually complacent, falling back into old patterns of accommodating other nations and their religious-political-economic influences, which Jeremiah knew as idolatry. These accommodations frequently fostered economic oppression and exploitation of the least powerful in society; they squelched the conservative moral and religious voices of the day, and in general, weakened people's moral and spiritual resolve.

As we can imagine, his prophetic voice often put Jeremiah at odds with his family, friends, and colleagues and placed him in grave peril at the hands of the rulers. Yet, he persisted even amid his own doubts, frustrations, and uncertainty. He never turned his back on his call. He griped and complained, whined, moaned, and cried about it constantly, but he did not abandon God's call and God's message.

Jeremiah was not distracted by the so-called voices of reason and enlightenment of his day. He was not deterred by concerns for his personal security, comfort, or peer esteem. He didn't listen to the words of his family and friends, who encouraged him to conform to the status quo and moderate his message. He turned a deaf ear to the calls and admonishments of social superiors and colleagues alike to become a team player. Nope, Jeremiah stayed online with God, stayed focused on God's claim on his life, and God's word for the people.

Now what could Jeremiah, ancient prophet to the nations, kings, and the aristocracy of Judah, say to us today? Well, let's start with our national prosperity and autonomy. Over the last hundred and fifty years, America has enjoyed great prosperity and political power on the world scene. We used to be the world's economic, cultural, and scientific leader, not so much anymore. Also, we are not as autonomous as we once were given the amounts of our national debt held by foreign nations, giving them influence over our government, economy, and people.

In our nation's economic and political pursuits at home and abroad, indications are that our general respect for certain moral imperatives have declined to dangerous levels. Moral decay has set in making us vulnerable to our enemies through cultural and economic accommodations, not unlike Jeremiah's day. At the personal levels, we see this decay in increasing crime rates, ever increasing growth in various sin industries, an astronomical increase in out-of-wedlock birth rates, broken homes, drug and alcohol abuse, and STDs at pandemic stages.

In short, this nation is in big, big trouble beyond the demonstrated corruption and ineptitude of its government and its leaders, whose grabs for power and avoidance of moral responsibility has placed this nation on the brink of economic collapse several times in just my lifetime. It appears we are like many great nations before us; we are decaying from the inside out. Our nation and its people are selling out their moral and spiritual resolve to live life by divine principles and, as usual, in periods of great prosperity, we are indulging in social and moral experimentation. I think we see this clearly in the absurd novelties of so-call sophisticated, political correctness along with various forms of idolatrous multiculturalism like that of Jeremiah's day. Why is this happening?

That answer is easy: people, like those in Jeremiah's day, see no need to respond to God's fundamental moral and spiritual claims on their lives in times of prosperity, comfort, and relative safety. This is doubly so when others in power promise solutions to all problems, meaning people don't have to take responsibility for their lives or for the general state of affairs in their nation. People worship idolatrous individuality and feel-good religion promoted by a generation of materialistic, prosperity prophets, not unlike the prophets of Jeremiah's day.

Many of the aristocratic founding fathers and mothers of this nation believed that there was a Creator of the Universe with a providential will for all life on this planet and that will had favored the founding of this nation and imbued its citizens with the fundamental rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, the Creator did not and does not jump in and out of reality fine-tuning things at the behest of people or to correct their screw-ups.

God created the world and laid the frame work of cause and effect aimed at an optimum quality of life for all creatures. These founding mothers and fathers understood that the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness had to occur under an umbrella of people keeping integrity with the moral and providential will of God as revealed in divine law and the principles of nature. These laws and principles are simple but not simplistic, requiring very sophisticated discernment. However, as people have turned their backs on time-honored and proven moral and ethical life principles, they have introduced rot and decay into their personal lives as well as in the life of this nation.

I fear that often religion in America today, not unlike that in Jeremiah's day, frequently becomes a veneer of justification for certain social experimentation, decadent affluence, escapism, and self-gratifying, existential delusions. People long to participate in self-aggrandizing religion, which promises status and eternal security without devoting themselves to God's demands to do the hard work of justice, morality, and spiritual wholeness.

True, there are a vast number of religious folks in this nation, many of whom call themselves Christians, but social indicators tell me that sadly they have sought the safety of the herd. Many modern Christians do not want to be guided by the Holy Spirit but want to manipulate the Holy Spirit like some personal genie or imaginary playmate into giving them what they want as well as affirming their religious sentimentality and maudlinism as the will of God.

I think, too, many people are beguiled by the spirit of western, cultural modernity and its gospel of civil religion and prosperity. And, for the want of a few prophets to make a stand and speak the voice of God to an immoral, greedy, and complacent generation, many of our people are heading down a path that seems right, but the ends are personal and national moral decay

with all its consequences. For a lack of a few prophets willing to answer the annoying and sometime frustrating call from God to address the moral and spiritual needs of the world, billions of people live in utter existential despair, lost in unrestrained consumption, sensualism, chemical escapism of one kind or another, seeing death as their only ultimate hope.

Friends, Jeremiah's call in our text this morning is highly imaginative and poetical. Some of our calls to serve God may not have been as dramatic and poetical, but the fact is that every Christian, who has experienced the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, has received a call to serve God and to proclaim the will and ways of God. It is a call that if answered, will push us beyond our personal comfort zones and senses of security; it will be annoying and frustrating at times. However, if we, like Jeremiah, try to deny it, offering up various excuses such as our age, education, etc., we run the risk of living a life only half-full of what God has available for us now, and, who knows, maybe in the life to come.

In all of this, God promises that if we take up the inherent, prophetic dimensions of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God will equip us, prepare us, and be with us as we speak forth God's will to the nations, to kings, and the collective consciousness of the people of this nation and the world. So, if we accept and live out our call from God, I think we will be amazed at what we can do in and through the power of the Spirit of God.

We will be able to resist the temptations to be less than our best. We will find the spiritual discernment and courage to extend ourselves to those in need and to confront the powers that victimize and marginalize people. We will be empowered to live a Christ-like life and bask in the joy of God's will. This is all ours, when we answer the amazing call of God.

Do you hear your internal phone ringing? Answer it please, for God's sake, your sake, and our nation's sake.

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