

“I Don’t Want the Job!”—Jeremiah 1:4-6

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “I Don’t Want the Job!”, is Jeremiah 1:4-6 → *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.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Of the many words of wisdom my father taught me, I can still hear his voice in my mind: “Remember son, if there’s an available job don’t pass it up, no matter how much it pays. You can look for a better paying job later but don’t pass up the one that’s available!” It seems work ethics in our society today are a far cry from what they were years ago. Signs reading “Now Hiring!” are permanent fixtures as many businesses struggle to find workers amongst so many people who choose to remain unemployed because they simply didn’t want to do that particular work! Oh, to be so blessed that we can afford to turn down work! Certainly we live in a different culture with a different work ethic, no doubt attributed to many different dynamics in our lives today as opposed to years gone by.

In some respects it's no different when it comes to working for the LORD. The reluctance to do the work Yahweh commands us to do is displayed with all kinds of excuses. Why? Aside from feelings of inadequacy, fears can set in and sabotage the desire we Christians confess so strongly—the desire for people to be saved. Is it fear of rejection by others because it involves talking about their sin and their need for Jesus? Maybe it's actually fear of the “Boss!” What will He think of us if we fail at our job! Maybe it's the nature of the task. Going for a “Boss” to people who refuse to acknowledge Him as “the Boss!”

Our text is the account of the LORD “calling” Jeremiah to be His prophet. In one sense, Jeremiah should have felt honored to receive this “call.” It should have been a “self-esteem builder” for him since the LORD had chosen him as His prophet before he was even “a twinkle in his mother's eye!” Verse 5 of our text says the LORD knew him even before He was *formed . . . in the womb* and *consecrated* him—set him apart—to be *a prophet to the nations*.

Have you ever thought about your purpose in life guided by the fact that **God knew you and had plans for you even before you were born?** Such a thought should make us feel very special, shouldn't it? Unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way with sinners.

Notice the reluctance Jeremiah expressed in our text as the LORD placed him into His service. His first excuse is recorded in verse 6: *Ah, Lord GOD!*

*Behold, I do not know how to speak.* He didn't consider himself to be a good public speaker. I wonder if we've ever heard that before . . . like from your own lips, let alone the lips of others? If so, you hold good company not just with Jeremiah but also with Moses. This same excuse was put forth by Moses when God called him to go and lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in Exodus 4:10 → *Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since You have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.*

Jeremiah then stated another concern in verse 6 of our text: *I am only a youth.* Apparently he felt too young and inexperienced for the job. This is nothing new either. When God placed Solomon as the king of Israel, Solomon recognized his immaturity in 1 Kings 3:7 and said: *O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in.* The difference with Solomon was that he already had the job so it moved him to asked the LORD for wisdom to serve! Instead of using it as an excuse it was a recognition of His need for the LORD's help and guidance.

In all fairness to Jeremiah, though, we would have probably reacted the same with the job description Yahweh put forth in Jeremiah 1:10 → *I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.* What a "job description!"

The LORD appointed him to bring His Word to *nations and . . . kingdoms* in order to do things like *pluck up and break down . . . destroy and . . . overthrow*? Reluctance is understandable when you consider that Jeremiah was called to share God's Word which would point out the destruction awaiting God's people because of their sins. Such a task appears like an overwhelming responsibility since people don't want to hear about their sins or take responsibility for them, even though those very sins can separate them from the LORD eternally.

In the midst of every situation where God's servants are reluctant to carry out His assigned tasks, the LORD keeps reminding them that **it will be His power that will be working in them and He will give them the ability to remain faithful to His "plan" for them!** The LORD reassured Jeremiah of this as well: *Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.* (cf. Jeremiah 1:8)

Are there times in your life when God's telling you not to be afraid seems more like a clichè than a reality? Still, **it is God's promise!** It was His promise to every single excuse ever given. **He is the One Who carries out His plans through frail, inept, frightened, sinners like us!** It has to be God doing the work because, after all . . . all He has to work with is sinners.

God constantly encounters reluctance when He tells His people to serve

Him. All God has to work with to bring His law and gospel to sinners in a sinful world is sinners. So He knows your fears and struggles. This is why He gives His Holy Spirit. Only He can turn your reluctance into willingness! Through His Spirit we step out in faith, trusting that **He will do the work!** The Holy Spirit enables us to simply be faithful to God's "call" as we watch Him gift us for the task and watch Him accomplish His work!

Oh . . . and by the way . . . God never asks a person to do something. **He always tells them!** Check it out in your Bible. God never calls people into service by asking them. Rather, He tells them what they will do and then empowers them to do it and empowers them to remain faithful under the severe persecution which will accompany the proclamation of God's Word! Suffering persecution for faithfulness to Christ will always be linked in the Christian, to which much of the teaching of Jesus attests.

This task of pointing out peoples' sins serves the purpose of the Gospel —*to build up* those who repent of their sins *and to plant* them with new life in Yahweh's forgiveness! When people repent of their sins the Gospel of Jesus immediately needs to be proclaimed so that they can experience the complete forgiveness of sins through the pronouncement of absolution in Christ! They are "built up"—released from the burden of sin and "planted" where God puts them in order to bring His Word of Law and Gospel to others so they too can

be saved! Jeremiah also proclaimed restoration for God's repentant people!

The LORD promises to empower us to speak His Word of Law and Gospel even in those frightening or threatening situations. As with Jeremiah the LORD puts the words in our mouths when we need them! Listen to Jesus' promise from Mark 13:11 → *When they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.* Notice Who is doing the speaking—not you but **the Holy Spirit!**

God has also called you by His grace in Jesus Christ Who has forgiven you of all your sins, restored your relationship with Him and plants you in the various vocations and relationships of your life to share the Law and Gospel with others. Do you want the job? It's a tough job that will involve risks, suffering, discomfort and many trials. Be honest. Doesn't sound like a job anyone would want, does it? However, it needs to be done and God calls you forgiven sinners to bring His forgiveness to other sinners as He gifts you by His Holy Spirit to do the job through you.

Jeremiah did go for the LORD and his wanting the job had no bearing on his work. He also struggled throughout this work, so much so that he even felt "deceived" by Yahweh because of the persecution. Yet, he still confessed the LORD as Lord over that persecution and his struggles! (cf. Jeremiah 20:7-12) Why?

Because it is not based upon the nature of the work or the people you're serving. Rather it is based upon the Holy Spirit working through the proclaimed Word of God *to break down* the arrogant sinner and restore the repentant sinner through forgiveness found only in the Person & Work of Jesus! He takes your reluctance and turns it into willingness as you recognize that the power does not rest in you but in Him. He brings you to respond with the prophet Isaiah who presented himself before Yahweh saying: *Here I am! Send me.* (cf. Isaiah 6:8) God will always gift the called for the job He's given them to do. Amen.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*

(Zechariah 4:6)

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