

Canterbury Presbyterian Church – 17<sup>th</sup> Sept 2017.

Today we're going to look at the calling of Jeremiah and considering 4 points:

- 1) The timing. When was Jeremiah called?
- 2) The person. Who was Jeremiah and why did God call him?
- 3) The encouragement. Having received the call, God gives Jeremiah encouragement.
- 4) The content. The message that God called Jeremiah to deliver.

So first of all, the timing of Jeremiah's call. In verse 2 we read about the time during which Jeremiah prophesied. It was during the lives of Kings Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. A total of about 40 years, the last 40 years before Judah went into exile. Just before exile, yet God still sends a prophet. But God hasn't given up on the people of Judah. There have been years of rebellion. They were worshipping other gods throughout the reign of Manasseh and Amon, who were the predecessors of Josiah. Then Josiah becomes king, the book of the law is found in the temple, Josiah hears it read to him and repents. 2 Ki 22:11 we read 'when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. ' And he says (v13) 'great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book.' And so Josiah ushers in religious reform. Anything to do with worship of the false gods Baal, Asherah or Molek is completely destroyed. The Passover is celebrated, the first time in years. And while Josiah is zealous and sincere in the reforms, it appears that the Israelites did not follow his example. Certainly his son didn't, for after Josiah's death, his son Jehoiakim becomes king. The Bible says of him 'he did evil in the eyes of the Lord.' The next king, Zedekiah, the Bible says of him 'he did evil in the eyes of the Lord.' This is a dark period in Israel's history, when they had forsaken their God, the God who had called them to be his treasured possession, his special people. And they had turned their back on him and chased after other gods. Time after time, decade after decade, they gave glory to gods who are not gods. They bowed down to wood and stone objects Robbing God of the honour and glory due to him, In that context, God sends yet another prophet. We might think it's too late. We might think 'it's too late, for this person or that person.' Or we might think 'there's no hope for that group of people who think that particular way.' But God doesn't. It is never too late for a person, for a people group, for a nation, to hear the beautiful words of the gospel; of God's judgement against sin, and his wonderful promise of reconciliation and restoration through Christ. The second thing we want to look at is who God called. What was it about Jeremiah that made him suitable for this job? And so we read in verse 4 that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying '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.' 'before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart.' God knew Jeremiah, and the plans he had for him, even before Jeremiah was conceived. That is mind blowing. God knew what foods Jeremiah would like. What his favourite colour would be. What profession he would take up. How he would do at school. What his personality would be like. Who his friends would be. God knew all of that, in fact God knew EVERYTHING about Jeremiah, before he was conceived. It sounds very much like Ps 139 (read vv 1-5). God knew Jeremiah better than anyone, better than his own parents did, better than his best friend did. That means God also knows what Jeremiah will be good at, and not good at. What skills, talents he has. And how he can best use those skills, gifts and talents to serve God. God created him with those skills, gifts and talents So God knows how Jeremiah can best use them! Jeremiah is called to be God's prophet here, yes that's true. But before he is called, God has already made him Before he is called, God knows exactly what he is going to be like Jeremiah is not so much called to be a prophet. He was made to be a prophet. The application for us is this: For us, we are not called to mission. We are each made for mission. In Eph 2:10 we read 'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance

for us to do.' We aren't called to do these good works – we were made to do them! And the purpose of these good works? Jesus teaches us that in Matt 5:16 'In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' The purpose of doing good deeds is so that others would give God honour and glory. So in Ephesians we read that God made us to do certain good works And in Matthew we find that these good works are so that others would glorify God. Putting those two texts together, we were made so that others would glorify God! Just like Jeremiah was made to be a prophet to the nations, God already made him that way before he called him, So each one of us is made so that God would receive more honour and more glory which is due to him in the first place. Or in other words, we were made to tell others about God. We were made for mission. How does Jeremiah respond to God telling him what he is made for? This God, who knows Jeremiah so incredibly well, says to him 'I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' And Jeremiah says 'no.' Jeremiah says 'no' because 'I do not know how to speak, I am too young.' Moses said something similar. After God tells him that he's the one who will deliver Israel from slavery Moses gives a whole bunch of excuses including (Ex 4:10) 'Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.' God doesn't accept Jeremiah's excuse. He doesn't accept Moses' excuse, telling him something very similar to what he told Jeremiah. Ex 4:11 The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" Can you hear the similarities to the story of Jeremiah? It's like God is saying 'Moses, I made you. I know what your speech is like. I made it like that especially for this purpose. So get on with the job.' What's our response? When we know that we were created so that we could share the glory of our creator with others, so that our creator might receive more glory God made you uniquely you, exactly you, in order that you might shine the light of his glory in your life, so that others will see it and give glory to him. For some that is shining that light right here in Melbourne. For others it means shining that light of God's glory amongst those who have never even heard of God. But you have all been made to shine the light of his glory, so shine it brightly. But God doesn't leave Jeremiah there. He's told Jeremiah what his job is: you will be a prophet to the nations. But he continues with some wonderful encouragement. There's three parts to this encouragement and we'll briefly look at each of them.

I am with you. I have put words in your mouth. Vision of the almond tree. First of all, verse 7. '7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. 'Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.' Do you hear the comfort in those words 'I am with you and will rescue you!' I have two boys aged 6 and 8. Sometimes they wake up at night from a scary dream. They come into our room and wake me up They always come to my side of the bed, never Sarah's side And they say to me 'Dad, I had a scary dream.' I've tried various tactics over the years Like tucking them back in, giving them a cuddle and then saying 'I'll be just outside the door.' And then staying there maybe 5 minutes and then tip toeing back into my own nice warm bed. The problem with that is, that it takes them more than 5 minutes to get back to sleep. So after 8 minutes they call out 'Daddy.' And I don't answer because I'm back in my own bed again! So they check if I'm still behind their door, they realise I'm not, so they come back to my bed. 'Daddy, you're not outside our door anymore.' So now my tactic is this. If they come in and say 'Daddy, I've had a scary dream.' I just hop in their bed with them. And they don't worry about whatever scary dream they had anymore. Why? Because Daddy is with them! That's the encouragement God gives to Jeremiah right here. Don't worry, Jeremiah, I'm right there with you! We read earlier from Ps 139:5 'you hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.' Jesus repeats these words in Matt 28:20 'and surely I am with you always, to the very end

of the age.' The God who made you uniquely to be exactly who you are, Knew exactly what you would be like even before you were conceived, Knows exactly what you like and what you don't like, What you're passionate about and what you're not, Who made you to bring honour and glory to him, That same God, He is with you! In whatever situation you find yourself in, look, there's your Daddy, your heavenly Daddy, He is with you and will rescue you. The second piece of encouragement is in verse 9. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." The Lord touched his mouth and said 'I have put my words in your mouth.' At the basic level, Jeremiah is here being made the spokesman for God, and God is encouraging him by saying 'I want you to speak my words but don't worry, I'll give you the words to say.' But the mouth refers to much more than simply the words we speak or say. The mouth is an image that we come across frequently in the Bible. It reveals what's in the heart. For example, in Matt 12:34 Jesus says <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.' And so a person's mouth is actually revealing of what is in their heart, i.e. their character. For example, this means praise and worship that comes from your mouth reveals your heart's desire to praise and worship God. The 'mouth' also conveys the idea of thought and knowledge. For example in Joshua 1:8 we read <sup>8</sup> Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.' The idea here is that the things that are important to you are things that you will speak about frequently. So for example, I love cycling and can talk about it for hours, but know very little about fishing and will be done in less than 5 minutes when it comes to that topic. So what I speak about reveals the knowledge I have. It also reveals moral character. When Isaiah is called to be a prophet, he laments that 'I am a man of unclean lips.' God then takes a coal from the altar, touches his lips with it, thus making him clean. Cleanliness of lips in that account is a demonstration of inner purification. And so keeping those three images in our minds: the mouth as revealing what's in our heart, of revealing what's in our mind, of a symbol of inner purification, So when God says to Jeremiah 'I have put *my* words in *your* mouth,' this is not a case of Jeremiah being a parrot simply repeating whatever God says to him. It conveys the idea of God taking his own clean heart and placing that into Jeremiah, to replace Jeremiah's filthy, sinful heart of taking his holiness as expressed in his law and placing that into Jeremiah, replacing Jeremiah's guilt and shame. of taking his own purity and placing that into Jeremiah, replacing Jeremiah's sin stained filth. That is what is happening here. Jeremiah is getting a completely new inside, a new heart, the old is being replaced with the new. The old of rebellion against God, of stubbornness, of thinking 'I can do it better than God' and 'go away God, let me do it my own way.' That heart is being replaced by God's own heart, his own thoughts, his own mind. So that now, Jeremiah's heart will beat in tune with God's heart. His thoughts will be God's thoughts. His words will be God's words. Because God has come to live inside of him. And this is the encouragement for us. That same God has come to live inside of you. When Jesus went up to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit in his place, who has come to live inside of us, so that with the HSp inside of us, we are a new creation. And so the power, the ability to reflect God's glory, to take the knowledge of his fame to the ends of the world, that power comes not from us ourselves. No, it comes from God! What an encouragement! We don't have to rely on our own strength in order to share of God's goodness with others. We can rely 100% on God! Because he has come to live inside of us, and so our lives will most naturally be a reflection of who God is, and his glory! And so that's the second encouragement: God lives in us, he is the enabler. God gives Jeremiah a third encouragement. A vision of an almond tree. There's a play on words in the Hebrew here that doesn't come through in the English. The word for 'almond' sounds almost like the word for 'watching' which is what God says he is doing. V 12 'the LORD said to me "you have seen correctly, for I am

watching to see that my word is fulfilled.” God is watching. He doesn’t send Jeremiah out there to preach judgement in Israel, and then sit back and do nothing. No, God is watching, this means that he makes sure that every word that he says through Jeremiah will come true! Jeremiah will not look like a fool, and God will not look like a fool, because what he says will happen. The encouragement is this. As we share with people of God’s judgement and wrath against sin, we know that God is watching and that he will judge sin. And as we share with people of God’s grace and his promise of reconciliation for those who by faith put their trust in him, God is watching and he will keep that promise. God is watching to see that his word is fulfilled, and he is watching today as his word goes out over all the world still today, as it goes out from your life, God is watching. So those are the three messages of encouragement that Jeremiah receives, and that we receive today. God is with us, always, in fact he lives inside us and works through us and finally he is watching to make sure that his promises will come true. The final point; the content of Jeremiah’s message. Verse 13-16 (read) Words of disaster against Judah. Of this foreign nation from the North, which is Babylon, invading Judah. Their dignity and honour gone. Foreign kings setting up their thrones in Jerusalem. Why? Why this disaster? V 16 <sup>16</sup> ‘I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made.’ Jeremiah is in a long line of prophets who all gave the same warnings. Return to the God who created you, who made you. You are his treasured possession! Honour him! Worship him! But like the prophets before him, they rejected Jeremiah also, despised his message and so despised God. And so God is proved just in his judgement. His judgement on Judah wasn’t random, it was because of their wickedness. There was no way they could go up to God and say ‘that wasn’t fair!’ Because it was. God, who had been patient for so long, has now become their enemy. Judgement for their sins. Not an easy message to have to tell anyone. I can understand why Jeremiah was reluctant to take this job. And yet see God’s charge to him: verse 17 ‘get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you.’ In other words, share with them everything. Don’t leave out the bits that don’t sound nice, the bits that make you unpopular. And that’s the same for us today. As we take God’s message, we can’t leave out bits that people don’t want to hear. We can’t change it to make it palatable. We need to declare the whole word of God. A God who hates sin. Who hates it when we put other things at number 1 in our lives, and not him. A God who hates it when we worship creation and created things, or pleasure or his blessings, rather than Him – the creator and giver of all things. And see once again that God encourages Jeremiah. Verse 18 <sup>18</sup> ‘Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. <sup>19</sup> They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the LORD. God doesn’t say that Jeremiah will have it easy all the time. But he does promise to sustain him, to help him be able to stand, against opposition. And the repeat of those comforting words ‘for I am with you’ that we have already looked at. The same is true for us today. As we witness of the truth of God in our city, in other nations far away, it’s not always going to make us popular. God never promises that. But he does promise that he will be with us, and that he himself is the power that will sustain us. So let us be bold in proclaiming the glory of God, to our city, and to the ends of the earth.

Let us pray.

