

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah – 26 Sep-2 Oct 2015

Christ called Jeremiah to prophetic ministry before he was born. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). This calling of ministers before they are born is a common narrative in the Bible. Others who were called before they were born include Samson and John the Baptist whose work was laid out for them before they were born (Judges 13:2-14; Luke 1:13-17). Pharaoh, the haughty, defiant king of Egypt, had also been chosen to make the name of God known throughout all the earth (Exodus 9:15-16), but he refused to do it as the acknowledged servant of the Lord, and so the work had been accomplished through his obstinacy. The heathen king Cyrus was named more than a hundred years before he was born, and his part in the work of God was laid out for him (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-4). Likewise was the calling of Jeremiah to ministry.

These callings are not isolated cases, but are recorded for the purpose of showing us that God rules in the world. It is as true of all men as it was of the Thessalonians, that “God hath from the beginning chosen” them “to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). It rests with every one to make his “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). And He “who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), has also appointed “to every man his work” (Mark 13:34). He who leaves not Himself without witness even in the inanimate creation (Acts 14:17; Romans 1:20), would fain have man, His highest earthly creation, willingly give such witness to Him as can be given only by human intelligence. All men are chosen to be witnesses for God, and to each is his labour appointed. All through life the Spirit is striving with every man, to induce him to allow himself to be used for the work to which God has called him. Judgment will reveal wonderful opportunities men have recklessly flung away.

Our Lord, who appointed Jeremiah to his work, still appoints to every man his work. It is not merely that there is work for every one, but that there is a *work* for every one. Each person has some specific work laid out for him. It may be a very humble work, but that makes no difference. Not all have the same work, or the same kind of work; very few are chosen to carry on a great work that will attract the attention of the world, yet the Lord nonetheless plans their work for them. And since the Lord’s work cannot be complete unless all the parts are finished, it is evident that the least work is not unimportant. And the man who is appointed to a small task, and who does it well, will surely receive the same commendation from the Master that is received by the one who has a great amount to do.

Knowing this truth that all men are chosen to be witnesses for God, will not only make life more real for us, leading us to seek to know the will of God for us individually, and to submit wholly to Him, that He may use us to do the work for which He has designed us, but it will tend to make us more considerate of others, and not to despise the least. What a wonderful, a joyous, and yet a solemn thought, as we see men moving about, that to each one of them God has given a work of his own to do. They are all servants of the Most High God, each one assigned to special service. It is a wondrous privilege, and a wondrous responsibility. Yet, how few are doing the work God would have them do! We should be extremely careful not to hinder any person in the slightest degree from doing his heaven-appointed task.

In studying the call of Jeremiah and of all men, another thing that we should remember is that it is God who gives to every man his work. Each one is to receive his orders from God, and not from men. Therefore, we should beware of dictating to men concerning their duty. God can make it plain to them, as well as to us; and if they will not hear Him, they will not be likely to hear us, even if we could direct them in the right way. “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23), much less to direct the steps of some other man.

God has always desired salvation for all men; thus He called Jeremiah to be a prophet to all nations. This included Jews and Gentiles. By many agencies God made Himself known among all nations, yet Jeremiah was specially chosen as the prophet to the Gentiles, or heathen. In Jeremiah 1:5, “before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations,” the Hebrew word from which the word “nations” is translated is the very same that is regularly translated “heathen.” “Why do the heathen rage”

(Psalm 2:1). "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, ... Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen ..." (Joel 3:9-11). The words "heathen" and "Gentile" in these texts are the same as the word "nations" in Jeremiah 1:5; this can be seen by comparing the different Bible renderings. So the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee, a prophet unto the Gentiles.' Let no one say that God ever at any time confined His truth to any one people, whether Jew or Gentile. "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

Like Jeremiah, we need to be acquainted with the Lord, to know His sin cleansing and His keeping power, if we must be witnesses for God. He who knows this for himself, because he has in him Christ's own testimony, so that he has no need of any human assurance of the fact, can speak with an authority that is impossible to the greatest scholar in the world, who has not that witness. The whole secret of the power of the apostles was that "they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Not only will one who has been with Jesus, and who walks with Him, be able to witness for Him, but he will not be able to keep from testifying. The rulers threatened the apostles with the severest punishment if they persisted in witnessing for Christ, but they said, "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Jeremiah had a similar experience. Jeremiah was derided and reproached and threatened, and he says: "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9). Remember that these men were ordinary men, such as we are. The apostles were fishermen whom the Lord called; and Jeremiah was a timid child until God put His words in his mouth (Jeremiah 1:4-9).

It is utterly impossible that a man should long possess the truth while pursuing an unrighteous course. It is impossible that a man should have the truth at all while living in the commission of deliberate sin. For Christ is the truth, and the whole truth; whosoever has not Christ, has not the truth; and the man who lives an ungodly life has not Christ. It may be said that an ungodly man may possess a correct theory of truth. That is so, but a theory will not save him, neither will mere theory advance the cause of truth. But the word of God unhampered will grow and multiply. It will enlarge the one who has it. It must manifest itself. This was the experience of Jeremiah with the Word inside him. If Jeremiah had persisted in his first intention, to "not mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name" (Jeremiah 20:9), and had refused to speak, that word which was as a burning fire shut up in him, would soon have gone out. The word of God is like a fire; but if a fire is confined, and not given vent, it will soon go out. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1). A man may have the truth, but if he fails to give earnest heed to the truth he knows, he will soon lose it. He may retain a mental conception of the theory of truth, but he can no more be said to be holding the truth than a man who has an articulated skeleton can be said to be holding a man.

The Lord commissioned Jeremiah to "go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak" (Jeremiah 1:7). "I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9). His message was largely unheeded. In human terms his success may be judged an abysmal failure. He often wept because he loved the people, but they refused to hear what God was saying to them. God appointed Jeremiah to an international ministry "to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Erroneous beliefs and practices must be destroyed before reconstruction can take place. A new building cannot be constructed until the old structure it will replace has been demolished. Judah, under King Manasseh and a corrupted priesthood, was led into idolatry, into Baal worship. Our Lord still calls the Jeremiahs to pull down erroneous beliefs and replace them with the truth in Jesus.

After we have heeded the Jeremiah Call, done the Lord's work, we take no credit, we give glory to the Lord for serving Him, for we are His servants, even better "we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:7-10). Our Lord created us, redeemed us, and He preserves us. "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not" (Lamentation 3:22). Knowing that "gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful," we forever say, "O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:5, 16).