

Jeremiah was a bullfrog? Prophet Jeremiah was a bullhorn—for God.

Jeremiah a prophet to the Southern Kingdom, Judah. Jeremiah’s call different from other prophets so far this season. Others were “second career” prophets.

Jeremiah says God appointed him as a prophet **before he born.**

Beautiful language: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you—*set you apart for a special purpose*—I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” **How would you respond if you heard those words? Can we hear those words as if spoken to us?** So what is our calling, our purpose in life?

Jeremiah’s calling different another way. While the other prophets saw themselves as prophets “in Israel” or “to Judah” or “to the king,” Jeremiah records that God foreordained him so that God could “give” him “as a prophet *to the nations*” (1:5).

Curious designation, because **bulk of his book, and the bulk of his life,** apparently, was not an “international prophecy tour.” But, **he was a prophet in Judah** to and with a people **about to be exiled to Babylon,** where they’d live side by side with exiles from many nations. Once there (ch. 29), the prophecy to his people was to **work for the welfare of that** (multinational and multireligious) **city** where God had sent them as exiles.

Sounds a little like where we live today doesn’t it? Are we working for the **welfare** of our multinational and multireligious city? That’s God’s **will,** regardless of century or place.

Jeremiah’s particular purpose a bit disturbing. God has given him the words in his mouth “to **pluck up, to break down, to destroy, to demolish, to build up and to plant**” **nations** (1:10). But when it comes to **destroying the old, corrupt, off-track ways,** God is about making **all things new.** Jeremiah is simply being **obedient to God’s call.**

But Jeremiah questioned his call! His immediate **reaction**—even after **beautiful** words of **calling** from God—was: “*Ah, Lord God! [ie, Are you crazy?] Truly, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.*” He’s got **excuses.** **We’ve** got excuses. He’s too **young, simple, untrained.** **How can he speak for God—to the nations?**

God responds—can we hear this in response to **our** own excuses?—“*Do not say [whatever excuse is!]. 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 Lord.

Can we hear this too? What would God say to our excuses for why we don’t say an **encouraging** word about God to someone who **needs** to hear it?

God says Jeremiah was **known and loved and set apart** even before he was born. Set apart for a **purpose, a calling, a meaning for life.** I believe that is **true for each one of us.**

Psalms in 71 echoes this: “*For you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence since I was young. I have been sustained by you ever since I was born; from my mother’s womb you have been my strength; my praise shall be always of you.*” **Can you pray that?**

God knows us from very beginning. God loves us and strengthens us, God calls us in unique ways—if we are **open** to it, if we **acknowledge** it, and **live out** our calling every day.

Whether we are called to be “preachers” on Sunday, or simply “**proclaimers**” by our **lives** and with our **words** wherever we go, the Lord has **known** us since we were in mothers’ wombs, and **gives us God’s word** to share, **if we are open to it.**

What about the woman in Luke 13? The woman had “*a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years, bent over and quite unable to stand up straight.*” What happened? **Did God speak to her in the womb,** assuring her of God’s love and strength and calling?

I think so! Her calling was to come into the synagogue that Sabbath day so Jesus could heal her and **make clear the will of God to a corrupt and distorted religious system.** God, through Jesus, **seeks to make all things new, and uses this woman** as part of that **prophetic work** against a **system** that held to every jot and tittle of the law and ignored **God's overarching law of love. Sabbath** was made for a **reason**—to rest and focus on God, something **we still need to strive for**—but it wasn't the **be all and end all.** **Jesus angrily confronts the leaders** who insist that his healing work broke God's law, "*You hypocrites!*" *You take care of animals on Sabbath, "ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham—known and consecrated in her mother's womb BTW!—whom Satan bound for 18 long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"*

His opponents are put to shame, and people rejoice. Jesus too is a prophet, recognizing the God-given worth of this woman, and **her calling** is fulfilled.

The message is bigger than "people are at least as important as animals." In **deformed** condition woman suffered for so long, she had become **religiously marginalized.** Such people not allowed in Temple. Surprising she was **allowed** in the synagogue.

In the synagogue, as woman she'd be seated at **back** of the room, with other **women,** not permitted to participate in worship offered by the men. Not even supposed to **speak.** **Jesus as teacher** would've been seated **front and center.** Jesus calls her up, so she's being invited, empowered by Jesus to **move into men's place. There** he lays hands on her. **Immediately,** she stands **straight** and begins **praising, worshiping God—out loud!**

Woman crippled for 18 years now **stands** (like the men) and **praises** God (as only men were to do), all at instigation of **guest rabbi,** Jesus of Nazareth. **Luke doesn't say it,** but any Jewish reader or familiar with Jewish synagogue practices would have known it.

So synagogue leader wasn't just **mad** about Jesus breaking a rule about **not doing work** on Sabbath. That was convenient law to use as excuse. This wasn't **all** about the **Sabbath.** It was about **control.** And not just about **control** in this **service, but of the system.**

Torah never was intended to be about **keeping people** in their places—which really means keeping "**lesser**" people in places the **most powerful** want them to stay! Instead, Torah all about **setting people free** to worship and serve God and neighbor. **Special calling.**

When **kingdom of God draws near,** things like this happen. **Marginalized** are brought to the center. The "**impure**" are touched and healed. God **plucks up, breaks down, destroys, demolishes** what's corrupt and misguided to **build up** and to **plant** something new.

Let us **hear and heed the call** of Christ to us, to break out of our old comfortable way of seeing and doing things; **let's look at the world with the fresh eyes of Jesus,** see the world as a place **filled with opportunities to bend the rules in the name of love.**

A couple years ago I got an email through my church website:
Hi, I was just wondering, do you think if there is a hell I will be condemned there after my death? You see, I am an introvert and don't do well in church settings. I have often felt pressured by some people that I need to be in church and some of these people claim that not going to church is a sin. I am someone with Aspergers who has always been "different". While I do believe in a higher power, I prefer to seek my own interpretation and expression of her/him. I left the church because I don't feel like I can ever connect with anyone there because of being different.

So... did God see this man in the womb, too? What would you say to him? Amen.