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It's Your Call: Before You Know It Jeremiah 1:1-10

We're continuing this morning our sermon series about calling, titled *It's Your Call*. When I think about calling I can't help but think about these critical moments in life or experiences that shape the rest of our lives. Have you had an experience in your life that caused everything to change? Last weekend I officiated for two weddings. One of the things I reminded the couples of was that their lives would be forever changed as a result of putting on these fancy clothes, making these vows to each other, and putting on those rings. Their wedding would be a defining moment in their lives.

What have been the defining moments in your life? 10 years ago this weekend I was visiting Chapel Hill as a candidate for the Youth Pastor position. A few days after our visit, the search committee called me to say that they had unanimously decided that I was the person God was calling to be the next associate pastor at Chapel Hill. God's call to Gig Harbor was a defining moment in our lives.

Have you had moments like that? There are times in every individual's life, and every organization's life, that can be described as nothing less than a defining moment. That's what we're going to look at today in the Scripture text; please turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah 1. This is the account of what might have been the preeminent defining moment for the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah; this moment is deeply connected with his calling, and yet, God reveals to him something that is so much deeper than the moment that he is in. If you miss it, you will miss a critical point about our calling in Christ. But if you truly grasp it, by the help of the Holy Spirit, perhaps today will be one of those defining moments for you, and for us.

This is the beginning of Jeremiah's great book of prophecy. The book is an incredible mix of judgment, and hope, and personal struggle, and faithful obedience. Jeremiah was a young priest from a little town on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He lived during a critical time in the history of God's people. Since the nation had split, king after king had led both Israel and Judah away from the God who brought them out of Egypt; the nation as a whole was a distant cry from the priesthood—the mission people—that God had called them to be. So God raised up prophets to speak God's truth to the people and the powers that be—Jeremiah was one of those prophets.

How does God take a young priest from the country and turn him into a great prophet? Answer: through the Word of the Lord and the experience of His presence. Look again at verses 4 & 5, "The word of the Lord came to me, 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." Take a moment and consider these words ... how do you think it felt for Jeremiah to hear them?

Let's consider them in chronological order; which one comes first? "I knew you." Think about that, God says to Jeremiah, "Before you were even an embryo, I knew you." Wow! Like an artist who has an image in mind before she draws the picture, God knew Jeremiah before he even existed. He knew the intricacies of his personality, the color of his eyes, the way he would laugh, and the purpose of his life before his life was formed. But God didn't just know him, God formed him too.

On Friday, the first day of summer, while it was pouring rain, Diane got out our bin full of PlayDoh stuff for the kids to enjoy one last time before she threw it all away. They spread out all the tools and little buckets of PlayDoh all over the table and had a great time creating and forming different things. You see, the fun thing about playing with PlayDoh is that you never quite know what you're going to get; you start out trying to build a car, and it turns into a camel somewhere along the production line.

When God formed Jeremiah, it was different. Jeremiah was no accident of nature. He wasn't just a random combination of DNA. Jeremiah was formed in the womb by God; He is the Creator. He is in charge of all of life. He formed Him on purpose.

But forming Jeremiah wasn't enough, God says, "Before you were born I set you apart." God had something special in mind for Jeremiah before he was born. It wasn't as if God wanted to wait and see how Jeremiah would turn out before setting him apart. Even before he drew his first breath God had set Jeremiah apart for that primary calling that Pastor Mark talked about last week – to be with God, to be God's man.

Finally, "I appointed you." God knew him, formed him, set him apart, and appointed him as a prophet of God to the nations. Every verb is in the past tense; it is done by God's initiative. God isn't thinking about it; God doesn't have him on a probation period. God has appointed him—God has made him a prophet.

Can you imagine hearing that from the Lord? _____, I know you, I formed you, I set you apart, and I appointed you. _____, I know you, I formed you, I set you apart, and I appointed you. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, and God revealed to him the truth about his identity. He was known by God, created by God, consecrated by God, & appointed by God. What an incredible message from God to Jeremiah.

So, how would you describe Jeremiah's response to the Lord in verse 6? Well, at least he starts strong, with "Sovereign Lord" —I'm just not sure the tone of that "Ah" ... it makes a big difference if it sounded like "uuhh?!" or "aahh." But, at least he's giving props to God for being sovereign. But then he seems to think that God's made a mistake!! "I think you've got the wrong guy, Lord. I can't speak, and I am just a kid."

But, the Sovereign God comes right back at him – look at verses 7-8 – "Don't say, 'I'm only a boy.' I'll tell you where to go and you'll go there. I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it. Don't be afraid of a soul. I'll be right there, looking after you". Did God instantly make Jeremiah an old guy like Pastor... uh, never mind. Was Jeremiah still young? Yes. Then why did God tell him not to say that? Because, it didn't matter. The sovereign God—who always knew him, who created him—set him apart and appointed him for this purpose. It didn't matter that he was young (God already knew that).

Then God, in His grace, dealt with the whole 'speaking' thing in verses 9-10. "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.'" I love how God, in His grace, gives us tangible reminders of His intangible truths. God touches Jeremiah's mouth; he could feel God touching him. It's almost as if God is saying, "Do you feel my hand on your mouth? That's me giving you my words. Do you understand? Today, I, the sovereign Lord, have given you a job. I have appointed you, over nations and kingdoms, to tear down and build up, to uproot and to plant again."

So, which came first, God's call or the gifting, talents, and abilities to live out God's call? God's call came first. Think about the timing of Jeremiah's call; did it come when Jeremiah was old enough to be a respected elder in the community? No. Did it come when he had finished his PhD in prophetic studies? No. Did it come after Jeremiah had proven himself to be a gifted orator? No. When did the call of God come for Jeremiah? It came before he had the gifts or abilities or courage to pull it off. God's call precedes the gifts, talents, abilities, and even the courage to live out the call.

So what? Why does it matter that the call precedes the gifts and talents to live the call? It matters because Jeremiah knew that he couldn't do what God was asking him to do. He was too young to be a man of authority. He couldn't talk well enough to stand up in front of kings and kingdoms to speak the word of the Lord. He couldn't do it! So, if the gifts and abilities to live out the call came first, and determined the call, then God made a mistake with Jeremiah. If gifts determined the call, God would have looked at Jeremiah and decided on a different path... one that didn't include speaking in front of many people with authority. But God didn't make a mistake. God had chosen Jeremiah before he

was even a twinkle in his father's eye. First, he knew him; then he formed in a certain way for a certain purpose. God set Jeremiah apart before birth for the call that He had on Jeremiah's life. And when that calling was revealed, God touched Jeremiah and gave him the words that he needed to say. God gave him the courage to speak truth to power. God gave him all that he needed to faithfully live out the incredible call of God. But see, so often, we look at ourselves first – we look at our existing gifts and our existing abilities to determine our calling, but this passage teaches us to listen first to God's Word. We often put the cart before the horse; we put God's calling in a box, based on our current abilities. When you recognize God's calling, and you step out in obedience, God will give you the gifts you need to live it out.

But you know there is another reason that it matters. It matters because many of you, when you get right to the heart of the matter, think you're too young or too inexperienced or too sinful or too immature in the faith or too unknowledgeable or too shy or too unimportant or too something to follow God's call. You think following God's call radically is only for other people to do... people who are really spiritual. God only does big things through pastors or people in full time ministry. And, if you believe any of those things, you have been fooled. The Bible teaches us that God **is** calling you. God, the Creator of the entire universe, knows you; He formed you; He set you apart to belong to Him; He appointed you for something that He wants you to do for His Kingdom.

This isn't just a Bible-times thing. God is at work in our world right now. He sent the Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price for our forgiveness on the cross, but not just so that we could enjoy heaven. God sent the Son to reconcile the world unto Himself. Jesus died, but he rose in victory. God's Kingdom is here, and it's coming even more. Through Christ, God is making all things new. Through Christ, God is bringing everything under His Lordship. Our calling, both the primary call to be God's child and the secondary calling to do God's work, is a call to participate in this incredible thing that God is doing. No matter what you think of yourself, God is calling you to be part of what He is doing! And when He calls you, He will give you the gifts and the strength and the courage to live it out.

So, do you know God's call on your life? Are you living it out? What's holding you back?

Maybe you're like Jeremiah and you're coming up with some excuses: I'm not old enough, or I'm not skilled enough. What does God say to Jeremiah? He tells him, "Don't say that! Go where I tell you to go and say what I tell you to say." Beloved, in Christ you are known, created, and called by God. Stop acting like you're not. Some of you need to change your story. You need to change the way that you think about yourself. You need to stop making excuses and start doing what God is asking you to do. How big is your God? When you make excuses to God, you are doing nothing less than confessing your unbelief in our almighty

God. Stop saying those things about yourself, and go do what God is asking you to do.

Or maybe you're afraid to follow God's call. Have you ever been afraid to do what God is asking you to do? I have. I can't tell you how many times I've been afraid to step into the pulpit, or step into a hospital room, or step into a hard conversation or step into a more intimate relationship with God. Are you afraid? Listen again to God's words to Jeremiah, "Don't be afraid. I am with you. I will rescue you."

Don't wait until you get it all figured out. Don't keep saying that you're not ready for God's assignment. God's call precedes the gifts and strengths necessary to live it out. God is at work in our world, finishing the great story of redemption through Jesus Christ. When God calls you to participate in that great story, He equips you for it.

May you know in your inmost being, beloved, you are known by God, you are created by God, He set you apart to be His, and He has appointed you to be an ambassador of Christ Jesus to the world. No more excuses about not having what it takes; go where He tells you to go and do what He tells you to do... for His Kingdom and for His glory.

Take a little bit of time in prayer to consider what might be holding us back from accepting God's call.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. What do you think it meant to Jeremiah to hear God say the words of Jeremiah 1:5?
2. Why is it important for you to know and remember the words of Jeremiah 1:5?
3. Look again at Jeremiah's response. In what ways do you connect with his response?
4. What do you hear God saying to you in His response to Jeremiah's hesitation (verses 7-10)?
5. What does God want you to know from your study of this passage today?
6. What does God want you to do because of your study of this passage today?