

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
When the Calling Gets Tough
Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:2, 20:7 – 13

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, we enter into our fifth sermon in our six-part sermon series on the prophet Jeremiah. A few weeks ago, we considered Jeremiah's call, how he protested because he was young and didn't have the training to do what God was calling him to do. We also considered *our* callings, how each of our callings is unique, they may change over time, and the purpose is to put the part of us that wants to serve "me" to death so that Christ may live in us. Today, we take a dive into the difficult places of Jeremiah's call and into the places we would rather avoid in *our* callings.

In Pastor Jim's opening sermon, he spoke about the many hardships of Jeremiah's call. Jeremiah was bound in stocks, he was mocked, his friends turned against him, he was thrown into a cistern, put into prison, and threatened with death. He is often referred to as the "weeping prophet" – a nickname *I* for sure wouldn't want to embrace. Jeremiah was called as a young man, an inexperienced man, a man who would be the voice of God to a nation whose hearts were hardened toward God, a nation Jeremiah would warn of impending destruction.

I can't imagine that any of you would jump at the chance to swap places with Jeremiah. *I* for sure wouldn't want to. Who would *want* to speak against their own people and tell them that they are doing it all wrong? Who would *want* to be tasked with being the voice of God to their own people, and tell them that they are going to be destroyed?

Jeremiah *loves* his people. They are his family, his friends, neighbors, the people he has known since he was a child. They are the ones who trained him, taught him, nurtured him, and loved him. They are the ones who taught him his faith, who taught him about God. It would be *one* thing, to prophesy destruction on your enemies, like the prophet Jonah, but a completely *other* thing to prophesy destruction on your *own* people.

Jeremiah sees the destruction of his people, and he *weeps*. “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people,” he cries (Jer 9:1). He pleaded with them to turn to God and to be obedient to Him, but they refused. He assured them that their repentance, their turning back to God, would save them, but they refused. They continued in their rebellion against God, so God enacted His judgment on His people. Jeremiah receives *no joy* from his prophecy coming true. He does not gloat and say, “I told you so!” or “I really *must* be a good prophet; what I said came true!” No. Jeremiah *weeps*. His people are a people whose hearts have been hardened and have served other gods, and they are destroyed.

Jeremiah is *burdened* with pain, and he brings that pain to the Lord. Jeremiah does what we frequently forget to do as Christians – he doesn’t simply sit with his pain or tell his friends about his pain; he tells the *Lord* about his pain. What Jeremiah does here is something that we can understand, and something that we try to do. We bring our desires, our sins, our pain to the Lord, and this is all good.

What many of us *can’t* understand, however, is what Jeremiah does in chapter 20. Jeremiah calls the Lord a *deceiver*, and he expresses his sincere *anger*

toward the Lord for allowing him to endure such pain. Jeremiah name-calls *and* he hurls all of his anger at God.

Now *this* is really something. Is it *ok* to do something like that? Take a look at chapter 21. There is no response from God to Jeremiah's accusation. Scripture in fact gives *lots* of examples of God's people challenging Him, being angry with Him, and fighting him. Psalm 22 begins with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" (Ps 22:1). Jacob fought with God – and won. Abraham challenged God, and God gave him what he asked. Job challenged God – and God put him in his place. God's only Son was born in human flesh and *hated* to the point of being crucified on a cross, and what did he say? He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

Jeremiah takes his name-calling and his complaints to a God he knows can *handle* it. Jeremiah is angry and in pain, and he *lets God have it!* He trusts that God is like a warrior who will defeat Jeremiah's enemies in the end, but it doesn't mean that Jeremiah is happy about his current situation.

Why can't *we* seem to do what Jeremiah does? *We* experience pain and anger, and if we are really pressed, we might agree that we are not simply angry, but angry with *God*.

Think about it. Some of us are called to be parents, and our children are so far from God. *Why doesn't God just step in and change their hearts?* You are called to be a software engineer, and you constantly find yourself the butt of people's jokes because you're the only Christian in your department. *Why, God, did you call me*

here? Why did you give me this gift? Your calling is to live in the Silicon Valley, a place that is so expensive and transient, that you can't seem to get ahead. Why, God, did you call me here?

When we think about it, we *do* have questions. Some of us *do* have anger. And it makes sense. Our callings are *not easy*, just as Jeremiah's calling wasn't easy. We are called to be in relationships with people that only seem to cause us pain. We are called to be in work environments which are very difficult because of our faith or because of the particular work we do. We are called to live in the Silicon Valley, the most expensive place in the nation, and this means that many of us sacrifice something to live here.

But does it mean that because it is painful that we are not called? As American Christians, we have developed these fuzzy ideas about God, believing that God just wants us to be happy and that anything difficult must therefore *not* be what God wants for us.

In 2010, Kenda Creasy Dean wrote a book entitled "Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church." In her book, Dean frequently references a term called "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, or MTD, was coined by the "lead researcher in the National Study of Youth and Religion, describing what he saw as the 'default' religious position of American teenagers. [MTD could be summarized] this way: Religion helps you to be nice (it's moralistic), [religion helps you] feel good (it's therapeutic), but otherwise God stays out of the way except in emergencies (it's Deist). That's what most teenagers think." *Religion helps you to be nice, helps you feel good, and*

God stays out of the way except in emergencies. And the study went further. It described this theology as not simply something *teenagers* believed, but something their *parents* likely also believed.¹

Teenagers, parents, *many* of us believe that God's purpose is to help us feel good and to stay away until we really need it. It's no *wonder* we get confused when things are difficult for us, when things don't improve, no matter how *hard* we pray and no matter how *good* we think we are.

If we believe that God's purpose is to help us feel good, pain and hardship never make sense. Church, Scripture not *once* says that God's purpose is to make us feel good about ourselves. Scripture says that we are loved by God and chosen by Him, but not to lead a glamorous or pain-free life.

God's purpose is *not about us*. God's purpose is about *all* of His creation, and restoring all creation as it was intended to be. God's purpose is to restore you, me, and *all* people into unity with one another and into unity with God. And this is why the path will not be painless. It will call us to serve one another and to place our desires last. It will call us to sacrifice when we would rather fight for what we want. It will call us to become like Jesus, when we would rather be whatever we want to be. *This* is the life to which we are called.

Our callings are *not* easy, and most often they will *not* be glamorous. They will require *all* that we have and *all* that we are. But, we have an incredible promise, that God will never leave us nor forsake us (Deut 31:6), and that one day, we will be united with Him and we will no longer be in pain. Like Jeremiah, the pain we

¹ <https://churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-articles/145646-almost-christian-q-a-with-kenda-creasy-dean.html>

experience on this side of eternity will often cause us to draw closer to God. It won't likely be pretty – it may include crying, name-calling, and anger, but God is not afraid of you. You can tell Him what you really think about Him, and He will not run away. He will not smite you with a bolt of lightning. He will not turn a deaf ear to you. He is the One who hears and sees what is truly going on inside of you, whether you recognize it or not. He is the One who desires a relationship with you, an *honest* relationship, an *intimate* relationship.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread...for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut 31:6).
Amen.