

HAS GOD CALLED YOU YET?

Today's Text: Jeremiah Chap. 1

Extracts:

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Then said I: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.” But the Lord said to me: “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak” [Jer. 1: 4-7]

Kim Clark was the dean of the prestigious Harvard Business School, an institution that he had been associated with for 34 years.¹In that capacity, he was paid US\$407,000 per annum. He was on the boards of several high profile companies. Then, in August 2005, at the age of 56, he gave all that up in response to the call by his church to head its Brigham Young University, Idaho, a two-year junior college only until five years earlier. Clark was a former bishop in that church. When his colleagues in academia questioned his sense of judgment to abandon one of America's most prestigious business schools for a rural Idaho church college, he replied, “You have to appreciate what this is like. ... Imagine yourself getting a call from Moses.”

Teaching is part of the 5-fold ministry of the body of Christ [Eph. 4: 11]. Clark was called at the age of 56, and you can imagine how much of his Harvard prestige would now rub on his new assignment. In other words, he was called at the point where he could make the most impact. Therefore, God can call any of us at any age to become labourers in His vineyard [Matt. 9: 37-38]. Have you yet been called? If yes, did you accept it or are you still procrastinating? If you have not been called, are you desirous for it? Is there any of us who is exempted from God's call? Do you have to do anything to be called?

In today's lesson, we shall study the call of Jeremiah and learn a few principles for our own situation.

¹ Based on the news report, “Mormon takes prophet's call, spurns Harvard for Idaho,” www.cnn.com/EDUCATION/08/12/harvard.to.idaho.ap/index.html

1. How old are you any way?

We tend to extend our well-known impatience to the question of God's calling. Young inexperienced and untested pastors are anxious to branch out to set up their own churches under the guise that they have received the call to do so. Some others jump ahead to be preachers or prophets or pastors on the strength of a prophetic message they have just received without any idea of *when* God expects them to start. How old are you any way?

It may shock you to know that we do not know how old we *actually* are! The birth certificate shows *when we were born* but it does not tell us how old we are. For example, a one- year old child is a year old from the date of birth. How about the first man, Adam? When he was one year old, he was already a full-grown man! How old was he? One year? Of course not! Therefore, to know your true age, you have to know *when life begins!*

There are three popular theories of when life begins:

a) *Life begins after birth*

There are some people who claim that life begins after a child is born. This is the main plank of abortion activists who say that a pregnant mother has the right to abort her unborn child because the fetus is not yet a human being. Abortion becomes a civil right question and in many countries, abortion is either allowed by law or not frowned at.

This view of life is more pervasive than we may think. For example, on 2 March 2006, in Parma, Italy, a 17-month-old baby, Tommaso Onofri, was snatched from his home by suspected kidnappers and murdered. It set off a huge demonstration there and his death was reported as constituting a "moral defeat."² In Trinidad, a six-year old boy, Sean Luke, was found sexually assaulted and brutally murdered in a sugarcane field, and two suspects, 13 and 16-year old boys, have been arrested and are on trial. The death has triggered a spontaneous national protest and condemnation. Yet, every new day, millions of unborn babies are being slaughtered in state-registered clinics with the open acquiescence of their parents! There is no whimper of a protest but a loud sound of silence!

b) *Life begins at conception*

The second view of the origin of life states that life begins when a child is conceived. This is the position of the pro-life activists. They maintain that abortion is murder; that it is not a civil right but an evil right. They taunt

² "Baby slaying deemed 'moral defeat,' in *Newsday* (of Trinidad & Tobago), Tues., April 4, 2006, Section C, p. 9

abortion activists by saying that *the pro-abortion activist is the surviving child of a pro-life mother!*

By the argument of pro-lifers, a child should be nine months old at birth. So, at his or her first birthday, we should actually be talking of two years! But we know that pro-life people also count age from “date of birth,” not date of conception. Therefore, they do not help us to answer the question of how old we actually are!

c) *Life begins before conception!*

God says that life begins *before* conception for in today’s lesson, He told Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” [Jer. 1: 5]. The Psalmist adds, “Your eyes saw my substance *being yet unformed* and in Your book they all were written” [Ps. 139: 16]. Therefore, whether He brings us out fully grown like Adam and Eve, or as babies like the rest of us, only God knows how old we really are.

What is the significance of that? It means that He alone knows the timetable of your calling. Whether before you were conceived or after, whether as a child or as an old person, it is His prerogative to choose when to hire you as a labourer in His vineyard. So, if you have not been called, get ready!

2. The metamorphosis of God’s call

The butterfly is one creature that passes through a transformation process popularly referred to as metamorphosis. At one stage, you see a *caterpillar*, voraciously eating up leaves. Then, one day, the caterpillar is encased in a hard cocoon, called *pupa*, hanging tenuously to a tree. This takes a long time during which the insect can do nothing to hasten the process of maturation. Then, one day, the pupa breaks and an *adult* butterfly emerges. It rests for a while to allow the wings to dry up, get strong and be ready to fly.

In like manner, God’s call for labourers into His vineyard takes a similar process. Paul puts it eloquently as follows [Rom. 8: 28-30]:

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called to His purpose, for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, ... Moreover whom He predestined, these He called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We can adapt those stages to analyze the call of Jeremiah as follows:

a) *Jeremiah was foreknown*

God told Jeremiah, “Before you were formed in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” [Jer. 1: 5]. In other words, long before his mother conceived Jeremiah, God already knew that He was going to use him as a prophet.

That shows that God makes every individual *unique*. Identical twins do not have the same fingerprints or DNA. Have you not noticed in your family that siblings have their unique talents? From where do you think those talents come? They were put there by God long before the children were conceived because those are the talents God will later call on them to use to glorify Him. For example, after God had described to Moses how to build the Tabernacle, He told him, “See, I have called *by name* Bezalel ... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, *to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, ...in all manner of workmanship*” [Ex. 31: 2, 3, 4]. Therefore, God already foreknows us and what He wants us to do for Him ultimately. If you look around yourself and know the talents that you seem to use with relative ease, then, you have an idea what God brought you into the world to do for Him.

b) *Jeremiah was called while a youth*

Until God spoke to Jeremiah, he did not know that he was a prophet. He betrayed that sentiment when he told God, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth” [Jer. 1: 6]. Like other youths of his age, he might have played around during service or paid more attention to his studies. His counterparts of today would go to church merely to listen to music or see beautiful friends!

We have no control over when we are called. Samuel was a mere child staying with Eli the priest when he was called as prophet and judge [1 Sam. 3: 2-18]. Mary was a young teenager and virgin when she was called to be the mother of Jesus [Lk 1: 34-38]. On the other hand, Moses was 80 years old when God called him by the burning bush to lead the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt [Ex. 3: 1-6; 7: 7]. Your status or work does not matter. For example, the little slave girl from Israel who was Naaman’s wife’s maid was the one used by God to minister healing to Naaman. She told her mistress, “If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy” [2 Kgs 5: 1-3]. Amos was a sheep breeder and “a tender of sycamore fruit” when God called him as a prophet [Amos 7: 14]. So, your current status may not determine what God is preparing for you!

c) *Jeremiah was commissioned*

After assuring the youth that He would be with him to deliver him, God put forth His hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth and said to him, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have *this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant*" [Jer. 1: 9- 10]. Here, God gave Jeremiah his "terms of reference," that is, the specific assignment for him.

God will not call you to an unspecified duty. Paul was specifically an apostle to the Gentiles while the gospel to the Jews was committed to Peter [Gal. 2: 7]. If you find yourself doing everything or desiring to do what is popular or membership drawing, you have not yet been commissioned. Wait for your turn!

d) *Jeremiah was empowered*

Remember that the young man would still be scared of his assignment, no matter the assurances that God had given him. So, God empowered Jeremiah for the work. He did so by building up his faith and showing him signs to confirm the call. God showed him a vision of something and asked him to name it. Jeremiah said, "I see a branch of an almond tree." God said to him, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word." [Jer. 1: 11-12]. In like manner, God showed Jeremiah a boiling pot [vv. 13-17]. Having prepared him for his call, God then assured Jeremiah, "I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land...They will fight against you, but they will not prevail (because) I am with you... to deliver you" [vv. 18, 19].

The butterfly's wings need to be empowered before it can fly. In like manner, you should not rush to battle when God has not trained and armed you. That was why, after He had commissioned the disciples to go and preach the Gospel to the whole world, Jesus "commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father," and that promise was "you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" [Acts 1: 4, 5]. In deed, ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples and cowards became champions. Three thousand converts were won and baptized in one day [Acts 2: 1-41]!

3. Lessons: you have already been called!

The Word of God, that is, Jesus the Christ made all things. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men "which gives light to *every man coming into the world*" [Jn 1: 1, 3, 4, 9, 14]. Conception *cannot* take place *unless* God permits it. This is well illustrated after Boaz had married Ruth. The word of God says, "So

Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, *the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son*” [Ruth 4: 13]. In another example, Sarah, who could not conceive earlier in spite of having relations with her husband, Abraham, got pregnant with Isaac at the age of 89, at the time that God had allowed it!

That has interesting implications, some of which are as follows:

- ❑ *God foreknew every one of us who has come into the world.* Therefore, there is nothing like an unwanted pregnancy or wrong race or colour of skin or unfortunate economic circumstances. Go to work wherever you find yourself!
- ❑ *We have been called to obedience and service [Eccl. 12: 13].* Therefore, the word of God has already revealed to you what to do [Deut. 29: 29]. *Just obey!*
- ❑ *If you believe that you have not yet been called, wait for your turn.* Paul was called as a mature and knowledgeable Roman citizen and Moses at 80. I doubt how many of you are there yet!
- ❑ *If you have been called but you are giving excuses for not accepting your commission, you are playing with a special privilege.* God’s purpose does not change but He can change the personalities. For example, when Saul failed as king of Israel, God anointed David in his place. Do you want to be trashed?

4. Conclusion: put the icing on the cake of a life well lived!

We thank God that you may already lead a fulfilled life. Your future may look bright and promising. Your children or siblings are doing quite well in their chosen endeavours. What may now be left is for you to take up your cross daily and follow Jesus. Do some stocktaking of your calling. Are you convinced that you are glorifying God with the talents that He has given you? Your call may not be as spectacular as that of Jeremiah or John the Baptist but, in the words of Jesus, “he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than (John the Baptist)” [Matt. 11: 11].

No call is too little. Cleaning the toilets or changing the flowers on the altar is a major calling in God’s eyes. Don’t just be a mere churchgoer, sitting on the fence and adding no value. Make yourself available to be recruited as a labourer in the Lord’s vineyard. Put in an unsolicited application. Who knows? Maybe He will call you today!