

A Sermon preached by Martin Tanner in St Mary's, Market Drayton on Sunday 16th October 2016 at 10.30am

JEREMIAH SS1 "Rise above the excuses"

Jeremiah Chapter 1 Luke 18 v1-8

TODAY we begin a new sermon series on JEREMIAH.

Jeremiah **is relevant for us today** because Jeremiah has something to say about living in a culture which has largely turned its back on God.

Jeremiah found that he was ignored, silenced and threatened with violence. And today, increasingly, Christians meet opposition standing up for their beliefs or talking openly about their faith.

So Jeremiah is **an encouragement to faithfulness** and perseverance.

Today we look at Chapter One and my title is 'RISE ABOVE THE EXCUSES' because making excuses is what Jeremiah did when God called him to be a Prophet when he was in his early 20's. **But God gave him reasons to rise above the excuses** and do as God commanded.

The truth is that most of us are VERY GOOD at making excuses.

Remember the excuses people make about why they never wash or come to church:

I never wash now because I was made to wash as a child!

I used to wash but it got boring so I stopped!

None of my friends wash!

I don't really have the time to wash!

The bathroom is never warm enough!

The people who make soap and only really after your money!

We are good at making excuses! And so was Jeremiah who in verse 6 said

"Alas, Sovereign Lord,

I do not know how to speak, I am too young"

Behind these words lie THREE excuses we may all make from time to time:

FIRST, Jeremiah says I can't do it because

I LACK THE NECESSARY ABILITY

"I do not know how to" "The task is too demanding for me"

SECOND, Jeremiah says I can't do it because

THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT. -I DON'T WANT TO DO IT NOW!

"I am too young"

"One day, Lord, when I am older and wiser and better equipped"

(2)

THIRD, Jeremiah says I can't do it because

THE TASK IS TOO RISKY

This is the reference to the *"I see a boiling pot, tilting towards us from the north"* in verse 13. Danger is going to come from the north in the shape of invading armies.

Now the excuses Jeremiah made LONG AGO are often the ones WE make TODAY when God asks us to do something. And guess what?

They fit *exactly* the three "T's" of our "Tasks, Talents and Time" Survey that the Task Group is asking us to fill in.

Namely, we say :

-The TASK is too difficult for me

-I haven't the TALENT to do it

-The TIME is not right

So let's hear God's reply to Jeremiah and see how we can rise above our excuses.

FIRST: "Lord, I lack the necessary TALENT, the right abilities"

Remember the old saying,

"It's not that God calls the equipped
but **rather that he equips the called**"

This is the exact promise of Jeremiah 1 v17

*"Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth
and told me, 'I have filled your mouth with words'"*

God called Jeremiah **and equipped** Jeremiah, despite his excuses.

Verse 5 *"Before you were born, I set you apart **and appointed you**
as a prophet to the nations"*

What God sees is not so much our ability **but our use-ability**. Not so much what we are right now but what we can be.

The truth is that Jeremiah, though young, **WAS quite well equipped**. He was the son of a Priest and grandson of a Priest. His whole growing up had been in a household of faith and commitment. God and God's ways would have been prominent throughout his early days and he would have learnt the Scriptures well and know a considerable amount about the Law and its practice. **He had a solid starting base to be a Prophet.**

(3)

And if God calls anyone, it because he sees something worth calling. So **none of us** should say, "I do not know how to" "I don't have the ability"

It's our use-ability God wants.
SO RISE ABOVE THE EXCUSE!

SECOND: "Lord, not now. The TIME is not right. I am too young"

Just remember that:

MOZART composed from the age of 5

SHIRLEY TEMPLE became a movie star aged 6

ANNE FRANK wrote her diary aged 12

Nadia COMANECI the Romanian gymnast scored seven perfect 10.0's
and won three Olympic gold medals aged 14

PELE was the 1958 World Cup football superstar aged 17

ELVIS was a world-wide superstar by age 19

If God called a YOUNG Jeremiah it was because he wanted a YOUNG Prophet.

How marvellous to have young people in the church who can be called!

In verses 7 & 8 we read,

"The LORD said to me, 'Do not say I am only a youth' for you WILL GO to everyone I send you AND SPEAK whatever I tell you. Do not be afraid, I am with you"

Do note the condition to the promise. God promised He would be with Jeremiah and Jeremiah did not need to be afraid and give excuses **AS LONG AS, first**, he went and spoke, young though he was.

The Lord can use us at ANY AGE and no age is too young OR (as I look out and around) TOO OLD!

SO RISE ABOVE THE EXCUSE!

(4)

THIRD: "Lord, it is, the TASK is, too risky"

Jeremiah was called in verse 5 *"to be a PROPHET to the nations"* and not a Priest like his father & Grandfather. **Now being a Prophet was MORE DEMANDING than being a Priest.**

A Priest's duties were predictable and laid down and regular.

But a Prophet never knew from one day to another what he might be called to do.

A Priest belonged to a special tribe and had a secure status and a secure income but a Prophet had neither.

A Priest dealt with externals: sacrifices, services and rituals but a Prophet had the harder task of having to address people who often didn't want to hear and try to change their hearts.

And Jesus, of course, was a Prophet and had the more difficult task. And if we are his disciples then, we too, cannot throw up our arms and say,

"No, Lord, this is too difficult, too demanding, too risky"

Because our Lord taught in Luke 6 v40

"A pupil is not greater than their teacher"

If our Lord's work was demanding, then so will it be demanding being a disciple and following our Lord. But we are no alone and not without help:

Verse 17 ff

"Get yourself ready. Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them. I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall. The people will fight against you but not overcome you"

The task may be difficult but Lord is with us!

SO RISE ABOVE THE EXCUSE!

In conclusion,

The "Gold Standard" is Florence Nightingale who said:

"I attribute my success to this:—I never gave, or took, an excuse."

For the rest of us, we do well to learn from Jeremiah. That for each excuse we may make GOD supplies an overcoming reason.

"HE that is in us IS GREATER than he that is in the world"

1 John 4 v4