

Didn't See That Coming

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series on several great Old Testament prophets by taking a look at the life of Jeremiah.

1. Warm-up question: Jeff began Sunday's sermon by asking if we knew what is the bestselling English language book of all time other than the Bible? Answer: *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. Is there a book (other than the Bible) that's had a big impact on you?
2. In past weeks, we've seen how Israel experienced a civil war that divided it between north and south. Eventually the northern half of the nation was overrun by the Assyrians, leaving just the south, known as Judah. Jeremiah was called to warn the people of Judah that they would encounter the same fate as the north if they didn't stop hurting the poor, living greedy lives, and being unfaithful to God. Through the ups and downs of Jeremiah's life, we can learn some powerful lessons for our lives. The first of those lessons is found in the story of how Jeremiah awakened to his prophetic call when he was just a child. Read Jeremiah 1:4-10.
 - a. Imagine that moment when Jeremiah sensed God saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." What thoughts and feelings do you suppose surged through Jeremiah in that moment?
 - b. Read Psalm 139:13-16. It turns out that what God said to Jeremiah is true for all of us. Imagine God saying to you, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you." How does that make you feel?
 - c. Read the two extended quotes printed on p. 3, one from Rick Warren and the other from Bishop Claude Alexander. What word or phrase in these two quotes most speaks to you – and why?
 - d. Jeff summarized the first great lesson from Jeremiah's life this way: **Finding significance in life begins when each of us, like Jeremiah, embraces the realization that, "My life matters; I am here to fulfill certain divine purposes."** Do you believe that to be true about yourself? Why or why not?
 - e. Tell us about a moment in your life when you've felt God calling you to something deep and meaningful.
3. Jeremiah's life also teaches us that it's not easy to find our purposes in life. Life is full of unexpected twists and turns. For example, Jeremiah reached a pivotal point in his life when he felt called to write down all his best messages on a scroll that could be read and reread, copied, and share with many. Remember, this was at a time when writing was still very unusual. Jeremiah expected his scroll to be so powerful, it would move his people to repentance and save the nation. He must have sensed that his purpose in life was finally all coming together! He could envision exactly how

God was going to work through him. But then things took a tragic turn. Read Jeremiah 36:1-23.

- a. Jeremiah thought he had God's plan all figured out. According to verse 3, what did Jeremiah expect to happen when he completed his scroll?
 - b. Why do you suppose the king burned Jeremiah's scroll? Describe the emotions Jeremiah must have felt when he learned his masterpiece had been burned.
 - c. Does Jeremiah's experience remind you of any time in your life – a time when your script has been ripped to shreds? How did that impact you?
4. Now read Jeremiah 36:27-32.
- a. If you were Jeremiah and God was telling you to start all over again by re-writing the scroll, what emotions would be running through you?
 - b. Jeff summarized the second great lesson we can learn from Jeremiah's life this way: **When the script you've written for life gets burned up, write a new one – however many times it takes, one page at a time, one day at a time, until you live into the fullness of your life's purposes!** Where in your life right now is God calling you to dare to do a re-write?
5. For the remainder of his life, Jeremiah continued to experience a number of unexpected twists. He re-wrote his scroll, as commanded, but still no one listened and Judah ended up being overrun by the Babylonians. Although many Jews were forced into exile in Babylon, Jeremiah was kidnapped by a group of anti-Babylonian rebels who took him to Egypt as a hostage, where he eventually died. At the time of his death, his life looked like a failure. Yet after his death, the words of his scroll eventually touched the hearts of his fellow Jews and led them back to God – and since then, his scroll has been handed down through the generations, ministering to many, even us today. From all this we drew a final lesson: **Our life's greatest work often happens in places we did not want to go.**
- a. Do you buy that? Have you experienced this principle at work in your own life?
 - b. Why can't God's purposes for our life be more obvious, so we can willingly go there instead of having to be forced there by the bumps and bruises of life? Why does it have to be so difficult to find our purpose and meaning in life?
 - c. Recently the house of two of our congregants, Annie and Cindy Smith, burned down – a complete loss. In the aftermath, when searching the rubble, Annie and Cindy snapped a photo of what they found in their garage. That photo is reproduced on p. 3. Everything but this angel was destroyed, including other items made of the same material as the angel. What do you think God is trying to tell us through this photo?

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*

“You are not an accident. Your birth was no mistake . . . , and your life is no fluke of nature. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did. . . . Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God. God thought of you first. It is not fate, nor chance, nor luck, nor coincidence that you are breathing at this very moment. You are alive because God wanted to create you! God made you for a reason.”

Bishop Claude Alexander

“There is a purpose for your being here. You are meant to answer something, solve something, provide something, lead something, discover something, compose something, write something, say something, translate something, interpret something, sing something, create something, teach something, preach something, bear something, overcome something, and in doing so, you improve the lives of others under the power of God, for the glory of God.

