

## World-Class Prophets

Jeremiah 1:4-10 NIV

The legend says that “when Einstein was a young boy, he was a late talker and naturally his parents were worried. Finally, one day at supper, he broke into speech with the words "Die Zuppe ist zu heiss." (The soup is too hot). His parents were greatly relieved, but asked him why he hadn't spoken up to that time. The answer came back: "Bisher war Alles in Ordnung." (Until now everything was in order).<sup>1</sup>

Thinking about this episode in the life of Albert Einstein reminds me that we cannot define our future by only looking at our past and present experiences. A kid who was a late talker and perhaps considered a slow learner became a great physicist.

The narrative for this morning tell us of the moment Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. God came to Jeremiah with some staggering news. *“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born, I set you apart to be a prophet to the nations”* (v. 5).

The text shows that the soon-to-be prophet was amazed at God’s words. Yet, his amazement had at least a pinch of skepticism. In the text, we see Jeremiah challenging God’s initial statement in a very diplomatic way. We could summarize his response as follows, “Lord, I am not ready for this yet.”

To many of us, Jeremiah’s attitude may even seem that of a humble person. However, I don’t think Jeremiah is being too humble. He is being negative, which is something we all go through at times.

Here is the reason why Jeremiah’s response did not come from a place of humility but perhaps a place of insecurity and low self-esteem. Jeremiah’s response is full of sarcasm. God came to him with the words, *“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born, I set you apart to be a prophet to the nations”* (v. 5). Yet, Jeremiah’s answer sounds more like, “Really? If you know things that well, you know this is not the right time. I am way too young. Neither I am gifted. I don’t know how to speak.”

Here is one of the things I want to share with you. Humility is not minimizing yourself because you lack certain things (experience and eloquence in the case of Jeremiah). Real humility does not make us hide behind an incomplete version of what it seems. Humility invites us to consider unexplored territories. Humility invites us to discover new things about ourselves, others, God, and the world around us. Humility focuses not on what you don’t know. Humility focuses on the things that need to be learned and attained.

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<sup>1</sup> Recounted in *The Mathematical Experience* by Philip J Davis and Reuben Hersh.

In the case of Jeremiah, we could say that what seems like humility is actually arrogance in disguise. It may sound paradoxical, but arrogance and stubbornness can grow from insecurities. Perhaps, we can see a glimpse of this seeming contradiction in this Biblical account.

Jeremiah is saying to the God who knows him better than anyone else, “I think you are missing a few facts. I know myself well, and I don’t think I am world-class prophet.” In a sense, Jeremiah’s answer was presumptuous. How can he know better than the One who formed him and knew his essence before he was even born?

By the way, this is not a situation that only affected Jeremiah. Moses and others had to deal with the same situation. We deal with the same dilemma. Many times we focus on the things we lack. We don’t realize that there is a lot of potential in us and the world around us that is hidden to our eyes but, it’s very clear to God. Perhaps, that’s the main task of a world-class prophet: to look at the world, including ourselves, through the eyes of God.

I am amazed by the fact that the first subject Jeremiah had to pass in the prophet’s boot-camp training was: Seeing beyond what meets the eye. The object of the lesson was nothing other than himself. Again, the best way to learn is from personal experience, right? So, God took a moment of insecurity and blindness in the life of Jeremiah to give him a new vision and a vocation in life.

Friends, IT IS your brokenness what God will use, not your flawlessness. God fills empty wells to quench the thirst of many. God uses broken vessels to shine his light. I love the fact that God turns impossibilities into opportunities and brokenness into purpose. God takes even our worse moments to make something memorable.

Jeremiah received a lesson that changed his life forever. I invite you to listen to the way God answered Jeremiah’s argument. *“Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ ... You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you...”*

Please, never think you are not enough. God has equipped you and will continue to do so for the glory of God’s name and the benefit of God’s people. You have gifts you can share with the world. Perhaps, you need to discover, or in some cases re-discover, what those gifts are — AND activate them — to put them into practice for the common good of others. But what is more important is that you know that you are not alone. God will never abandon you. God is with you, sending you and equipping you. God will continually provide for and through you.

I believe that as God’s people we are called to be world-class prophets. I would like to make clear what I mean by world-class. Usually, we use “world-class” to speak about what is super fine and great. Yet, I want you to know that you don’t have to be super fine to be world-class. You just need to be committed to the process of being refined by God.

Secondly, we are world-class prophets because the God we serve is unbeatable. The one leading our mission is outstanding and incomparable, etc. God is an awesome God.

Third, I want to make clear that I am using “world-class” to refer to the extent of our mission in life. We are world-class prophets because God is appointing us over nations and kingdoms. We have to intercede before God on behalf of the whole world. And, we need to intercede before the whole world on behalf of God.

Moreover, the mission we are called upon is to transform the world. Our mission is special. We are part of God’s team working with the Lord on the healing and mending of creation. Of course, we act locally, but we also recognize that our actions have global implications.

As world-class prophets, we are called to *uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow...*

We have to uproot hatred. We have to tear down walls of animosity and religiosity. We have to overthrow and destroy attitudes and mentalities that are detrimental to the wellbeing of humanity. We have to uproot stubbornness, indifference, and self-serving attitudes. We have to overthrow pride, anxiety, self-preservation and all other actions promoted by fears. We are called to uproot inequalities, injustice, hunger, exploitation, sexism, and classism. We have to tear down walls trying to isolate and divide.

We are called to *uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow...*

Likewise, we are also called to *build and plant...*

We are called to plant love. We are called to build bridges of friendship. We are commissioned to plant discipline, commitment, generosity and resilience. We are charged with cultivating justice. We are called to plant peace and wellbeing for all. We are to build a better humanity.

People of God, the Lord is telling us this morning, “*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*” (vv.7-10). We are world-class prophets. God is with you, sending you and equipping you. God will continually provide for and through you. God is calling you to discover and rediscover your gifts and the gifts of others so together we share them with the world.

We are world-class prophets. AMEN.