

Special Focus Session

January 17, 2021

CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

Jeremiah 1:4-10

I will never forget the Good Friday festivities taking place in the small interior town in northeast Brazil. We were IMB missionaries hosting a volunteer group in starting a new church. Because it was Easter weekend, the little town plaza was bustling. Our group had a half-dozen ministry stations set up where we were telling Bible stories, doing crafts, playing games, and sharing the gospel. By afternoon the crowd had grown to over 200 people. As I took a break to wipe my brow and survey the crowd, a nicely dressed Brazilian man standing beside me asked, "Sir, what are you doing here?" "I'm directing a missions project here in your town," I replied. He shook his head and smiled. "No, I mean what are *you* doing here?" "Oh," I explained, "I'm leading the group. We are starting an evangelical church here." This time he looked me square in the eye, and said, "That's not what I am asking. Obviously, you are an American. Obviously, you live here in Brazil. You chose to leave America and move to Brazil. You learned our language. Why can't you tell me in just a few words, for what purpose you have done these things?" I'm sure I stumbled through some "Sunday School" type explanation of why my family felt called to move to Brazil. But in the days that followed I was haunted by the stunning reality that a stranger in a foreign land asked me what my purpose on planet Earth was, and I couldn't give him a straight answer! Now I tell my students that story and challenge them to be able to verbalize in just a few sentences, to anybody, anywhere, why God put them on planet Earth for such a time as this.

If everybody really does have a purpose in life, what is yours? How do you carry it out? The call of Jeremiah offers some help.

God establishes our purpose (vv. 4-5). Jeremiah served as God's voice to Judah in the troubled times leading up to the Babylonian captivity. As a result, it is a book filled with heart-wrenching pleas for repentance amidst unwavering promises of coming judgement. The first chapter explains Jeremiah's calling in those difficult days. First, Jeremiah is told that his calling to service was a solemn act of a sovereign God. Three times in verse 5 God says "I did it." Jeremiah didn't ask for it. He didn't volunteer for it. He didn't appoint himself. Rather God said, "I did it!" So, three times God said *who* did it. Then twice, He pointed out *when* He did it: "Before I formed you in the womb;" and "before you were born." Then three times again, He pointed out *what* He did. Notice the progression: "I *chose you*...I *set you apart*...I *appointed you*." That Jeremiah would be a prophet *to the nations* meant that God's message was not just to the Jews, but to all people. For reflection: *That Jeremiah was chosen, set apart, and appointed indicates a specific and personal plan sovereignly assigned by God. What calling does God place on all believers universally? How then does His purpose differ from person to person?*

God accompanies us in our purpose (vv. 6-8). With similarity to Moses (see Exodus 4:10-14), Jeremiah protested that he was not a suitable spokesman for God. While Moses argued that he was *not eloquent* enough in his speech, Jeremiah begged off because he was *not experienced* enough in his speech. Notice that God did not "fix" Jeremiah's deficiencies. Rather, He promised to *accompany* him, *direct* him (v.7), and *deliver* him (v. 8). For reflection: *God appointed Aaron*

as a spokesman for Moses and promised His presence as an aid to Jeremiah. Who does God provide for believers today to assist them in carrying out their purposes for Him?

God equips us to carry out our purpose (vv. 9-10). In the final verses of our focal passage, God equips the prophet with two additional tools to help him carry out God's purpose. The first is *preparation*. After God promises Jeremiah His holy presence, He fills him with His *words* (v. 9). How confident and encouraged young Jeremiah must have felt! Only then did God equip the prophet with *information* (v. 10). Here, God reveals the enormity of the task. Jeremiah would be the bearer of both bad news (*uproot, tear down, destroy and demolish*) and the bearer of good news (*re-building and planting again*). In a prophetic span of about forty years, Jeremiah would depend on all of God's gifting to fulfill all of God's purposes for which he was called. For reflection: *What kinds of encouragements does God give believers today in carrying out their purposes for Him? Do we too have His presence? His words? His instructions?*