

Consider Your Call

Jer. 15:10-21; Mt 10:26-39; Jude 14-25



Today is “Consider Your Call” Sunday, as promoted by the Baptist General Association of Virginia. This day has been set aside specifically because there seems to be a growing need for more young people to step up to the challenge of placing their lives in God’s service as pastors, missionaries, and Christian leaders within and beyond the denomination. Perhaps the issue is broader than a simple lack of professional ministers. Perhaps at issue is how Christians view discipleship in general. If we are to consider our call, what is that call, anyway? Do we all have one?

Jeremiah’s was not a life of ease. He did not live in a time of comfort and security with the nation of Israel, nor was he among the privileged few in that day. The task laid upon him was no easy task, either. We might be tempted to question why in the world he would accept the call placed upon his life, for it did not seem to do him any good at all. One the other hand, we might do well to look at the way he measured his call, accepting a role that put him in a very insecure station before the nation. What kind of calling is worthy enough to withstand the kind of antagonism that Jeremiah was willing to face “in the line of duty?”

No one really wanted to hear what he had to say. His words may have been true and they may have been in direct accord with the will of *Yahweh*, but they were not the words the people wanted to hear. They desired comfort, but he spoke of desolation. They desired redemption, but he spoke of exile. They desired peace, but he spoke of coming war. They desired security, but he spoke of strife, insecurity, and military hopelessness. He earned the nickname of “Old Gloom and Doom.” He was not the popular man to be around, even getting imprisoned for raining on the king’s parade.

Jeremiah did not enjoy being “Old Gloom and Doom.” It was not a pleasant role, nor was it a role he had longed to fulfill. In many ways Jeremiah’s prophetic role was a burden. He speaks in the chapter we read of the despair under which he lived out the call of *Yahweh* on his life. So why bother? What was it about being God’s prophet that caused Jeremiah to keep on against the temptation to throw in the towel? For some reason, Jeremiah sensed that there was just nothing else for him to do. Being faithful to *Yahweh* was just not an optional issue for Jeremiah. Against the adversity he faced, he could do no other than remain faithful, speaking *Yahweh*’s word faithfully, as unpopular as that might be.

Society would tell us that we should follow a “feel good” ethic. We receive many messages to do what pleases us and live in accord with those things that bring us comfort, peace, security, and a personal sense of pleasure. Jeremiah’s society offered a similar ethic as at least one of the options by which to base one’s decisions and course of action. What would bring Jeremiah to live against the flow, being faithful to *Yahweh*, when there was little pleasure associated with such a direction? Why bother, when those around him scoffed at his words and paid no attention to his message? Could there be a more important drive to sustain him in the midst of the turmoil around him?

Jesus seems to have called for a similar quality of commitment. There were moments when Jesus went so far to push the crowds away, for they did not display the level of commitment Jesus demanded. In the Matthew passage we read, Jesus instructed the disciples to follow Jeremiah’s example in ignoring persecution, the flow of society, and all who would otherwise ridicule and condemn them. They were to

follow God's direction with no regard to the consequences they would face in this world. Jesus called them to trust God through the opposition they would face, recognizing that faithfulness to God would not make life an easy ride.

Jesus did not want the disciples to plan on being rewarded richly for their toil. He did not want them to expect financial wealth, popularity, fame, or status as the natural result for faithful service to God. There are many things one might do in order to achieve those kinds of rewards. Jesus was interested in a quality of commitment that would override the natural desire for worldly measures of success and achievement. He spoke of the gospel of God's reign as surpassing the worth of such meager and fleeting measures of success. He wanted disciples who would give everything else away in order to receive what only God could offer.

Jesus told the twelve that He was asking them for more than the demands of the Pharisees. Jesus warned them that he asked them for more than the zealot Zionists of the day. Jesus asked them to set aside their claims to their own lives and welfare in order to serve the Good News of God's reign. Jesus didn't preach a salvation reduced to getting one's name on God's heavenly guest list. The good news was so much more than a "Get Out of Hell Free" card. The message was so much more than a health, wealth, and prosperity sermon or a feel-good ethic for living. Jesus asked for a whole-life commitment. The disciples were to consider the call as requiring that they lay down claim to their will and their very lives. He said that kind of commitment was the *only* way to receive what God had for them. Jesus demanded a commitment that would stand firmly against opposition.

Jude wrote to warn believers of those who would somehow water down the demands of this gospel of grace and commitment. He warned of those who would abuse the gospel for their own worldly benefit, following worldly passions. Jude wanted us to be aware that many would seek to use the gospel as a club to gain earthly advantage. They would seek power, wealth, license, status, and those worldly definitions of success and prosperity at the expense of others. He warned believers that these would create division, for they would be consumed with themselves.

Division, by its very nature, seeks to put others down in order to elevate self. We create the categories of "us" and "them" in order to give ourselves a station of greater privilege, status, power, or reputation. Jude calls this the attitude of those who are devoid of the Spirit. He reminds us of Jesus' call to lay down our lives, rather than elevate ourselves. He reminds us of Jesus' demands to lay our all on the altar of faith and discern what it means to allow the Spirit to live in our stead.

What is God's call upon my life? Does God really expect me to live as radically as Jeremiah? Did Jesus really mean that I should give up any and every claim over my own life? Isn't that just for martyrs, apostles, missionaries, and maybe for pastors and deacons? What about the average Joe Christian? Does he need to live that selflessly as well? If we take Jesus' words at face value, we just might find that they would make us uncomfortable trying to answer those questions. If we accept Jude's definition of true faith, we just might find our own standards lacking. If we look at Jeremiah's faithful service against severe opposition, our own security might not measure up. If we are not careful, we might even begin to think the gospel is more demanding than we first thought.

Have we seriously considered God's call? How shall we answer?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*