

January 28, 2007

Epiphany 4

*"Don't Lose Sight of Who You Are"*

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### **JEREMIAH 1:4-10**

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**T**he word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>5</sup> "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." <sup>6</sup> "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Ever lose your keys and couldn't find them? How about the homework assignment? Where did I put that sheet of paper? What about the remote control for the television? Where did it go? And then there are the reading glasses? They aren't by the nightstand next to the bed. They aren't on the kitchen counter? They aren't in one of my shirt pockets? I need to hang them around my neck, maybe then I won't forget them.

Ever lose sight of who you are? It happens all the time. We get so wrapped up in our problems and troubles, even our ocean of blessings that we forget the special people we are to our heavenly Father through Jesus, and the special opportunities we have every day to serve him in his kingdom.

Jeremiah had a hard time remembering who he was, especially when nobody liked him. He was called to deliver messages from the Lord that the people did not want to hear. He had his low moments. Listen to him speak angrily to the Lord in Lamentations, "He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead."

I ask you this morning: when is it hardest to remember who we are and what the Lord has planned for us? Is it the hard times or is it the good times when everything is going so well for us? Is it the times of adversity or the times of prosperity? This morning we want to take a close look at ourselves through these words the Lord gave to Jeremiah. These words remind us who we are in Christ. They also remind us what our purpose in life is.

### **The Lord called you to be someone special**

The word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; appointed you as a prophet to the nations." The Lord told Jeremiah, "I have set you apart." The Hebrew word for "set apart" is the important word "qadosh" which is also translated as holy or sanctified. It was first used in Genesis 2 to describe how the Lord ceased from his creating on the seventh day and set apart or

a day of rest, a day to reflect on all the things the Lord did. Qadosh is used in Exodus 19 where the Lord calls on his people to set themselves apart as they wait for the Lord to deliver the law on Mount Sinai. Qadosh is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe the Lord as the true God, set apart from other gods. In a vision from the Lord Isaiah heard the cherubim and seraphim singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory."

God is holy, set apart from other gods. What a contrast this is to the human race that is not holy. We are not set apart from each other. We have the common bond of Adam's sin that infects us all. Listen to these words of Jesus in Mark 7. "For from within, out of man's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All of these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" We like to think we are set apart from certain bad people that we hear about in the news, but in reality we fall into the same camp, because evil originates from the evil that lurks with us as well. We have the common bond of falling short of God's glory and perfection.

How can a holy and righteous God set apart people who are unholy and unrighteous? How could the Lord God say to Jeremiah, "I have set you apart?" How could he say to the Apostle Paul who murdered Christians, "You are my chosen instrument to take my name to the Gentiles?" The path to being holy and special and righteousness can never go through us. It goes through Jesus. What did the Father say of Jesus at his baptism? "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Those words of our heavenly Father set Jesus apart from every other person who ever walked on the face of the earth. When the heavenly Father raised Jesus from the dead after he sacrificed himself for our sin, he provided the signal proof, the supreme forensic evidence that all sin had been paid for, and not a trace was left behind. It is through Jesus that people who are corrupted by sin and unable to set themselves apart to be special for God can find peace with God and be set apart or holy. The Bible calls us saints. The Greek word is hagios and it has the same meaning as qadosh, people set apart as very special.

Let me try and illustrate this blessing with something quite familiar to some of you here today. How many of you own a pet, a cat or dog? How did you acquire your pet? A trip to the pound, the pet shop, or maybe you bought your dog from a person who breeds dogs. When you brought your pet home you treated it special with a special place to sleep, special food, lots of attention and love. The animal was taken from the ordinary world of dogs or cats and put into a special place where it was given extra love and attention. In a far more glorious way, the Lord our God set you apart, put you on a pedestal, not because of anything he saw in you, but because of the pardon for sin that you have in Jesus and the righteousness that covers you.

You did not come to the Lord. The Lord came to you. He says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." Before you were born, before you took your first steps, before you learned to ride a bike, before you graduated from high school, before you were married, even before your nine months in your mother's womb, the Lord says, "I knew you." He had his eyes on you from all eternity to bring you to the blessings of being holy in Christ his Son. If you ever feel sorry for yourself, or lose touch with who you are in Christ, read Ephesians 1, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing

in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." " 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,' but God has revealed it us by his Spirit."

Because of who you are in Christ and because God has made you chadosh or holy and set apart, you have a very special purpose to fulfill in life that can bring meaning and value to your everyday existence.

### **The Lord called you to special service**

The Lord told Jeremiah, "I have set you apart to be as a prophet to the nations." A prophet is a preacher. The Lord called Jeremiah to preach at a young and tender age perhaps his late teens or early twenties. He told him to deliver messages to Israel and other nations about their future destruction. Later in this chapter the Lord says, "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you." For 40 years Jeremiah delivered messages that warned God's people about the sin of worshipping heathen idols. He walked up and down the streets of Jerusalem telling people that the Babylonians were coming to attack the city and haul them away because of their stubborn refusal to put the Lord first in their lives.

What is your calling in life? What does the Lord have planned for you? Why does he leave you on this earth when the joys of being with the Lord are so far superior to anything we know in this life? The answer can be found here in these words delivered to Jeremiah. We have a message for the nations to hear. Jesus told us, "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We have a calling to let the world know that judgment day is coming and before it comes they can share in the joy of being holy in Christ. "But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Jeremiah was afraid. He was reluctant. He told the Lord, "Ah Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." Reminds us of Moses who said, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and speak for the Lord?" Reminds us of Isaiah confessed, "I am a man of unclean lips." Reminds us of Peter who said, "Depart from me. I am a sinful man O Lord." Reminds of someone else we know. How often haven't we said something similar, "I am only a child." Remember it was a child who picked up five smooth stones from a brook, and hurled one with such force and accuracy that a nasty massive warrior named Goliath crashed to the ground. We think of the great prayer of Augustine who said, "Lord, ask what you want and then give what you ask."

The Lord says, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.'" The job would not be easy, but the Lord was with him and the Lord said to him "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue." Later in this chapter the Lord tells Jeremiah, "Today I have made you a fortified city, and iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land." This piece of iron in my hand is so strong. I can pound it with the hammer and it rings with strength. The people would try to kill Jeremiah but they were not able. Jeremiah was able to deliver the messages the Lord asked to deliver because the Lord was with him and give him the

strength of iron.

What was the purpose of the messages? "See I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant." The powerful Word of God delivered by Jeremiah would spell doom for the enemies of Israel. The same powerful Word would tear down false idols on the groves on the hills, and also the idols in the heart. The word of God spoken through Jeremiah would also build people up and turn their hearts to the Lord. It was Jeremiah who spoke about a Messiah who was coming and a new covenant made with Israel, where people would appreciate the Lord who would forgive their wickedness and remember their sin no more.

Look in the mirror, not the mirror of your bathroom or the mirror in your bedroom. Look here in the mirror of God's Word. See how the whole world needs you, your friends, your family members and people at work. Someone needs to bring God's Word to them so false idols are torn down and replaced with saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Look at who you are in the light of eternity and in the light of God's love and his kingdom that lasts forever. You will never feel lost or that your life is not important. Amen.