



©2019 Ginger Hertenstein
SERMON TITLE: The Nature of Personal Integrity: *Life & Times of Jeremiah*
SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 2:1-8
DATE: September 8, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also 2 Corinthians 5:14-18, 6:1.

The Bible considers the strength of the horse. God says to Job in 39:19-25:

"Do you give the horse its might? Do you clothe its neck with mane? Do you make it leap like the locust? Its majestic snorting is terrible. It paws violently, exults mightily; it goes out to meet the weapons. It laughs at fear, and is not dismayed; it does not turn back from the sword. Upon it rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin. With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground; it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds, it says 'Aha! From a distance it smells the battle, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.'

God was defending God's reputation as creator of such a magnificent and awesome steed. God understands strength. God designed courage. God gives the world pictures of qualities to strive for.

Jeremiah did not feel strong or courageous. He introduced himself to us as a boy. He was twenty, but he had little confidence. But God does not choose humans for their high accomplishments; God is looking for passion. Jeremiah was deeply interested in God. We know this because he sought to hear more of God's voice.

Jeremiah was called to a very important task though he was young: to shout a message to people who had turned from God. Let's hear it: READ Jeremiah 2:1-3

God loved these people. They were God's bride. God remembers the "honeymoon" in the wilderness. God remembers only good things because God patiently forgave when they didn't like the food or complained about not enough water. Even though they were demanding, they followed God and to God, they were holy.

They were, after all, "His." God protected them and gave them unconditional love.

But then they hit the land God was giving them and it was 'Katy bar the door.' They threw out everything they believed. Hear the story. READ Jeremiah 2:4-8. Eugene Peterson's version says it this way. READ Jer. 2:4-8 *The Message*

They totally disregarded their past. The priests. The rulers. The prophets. The people. God had to tell them the facts because they were taking themselves down.

So Jeremiah had to find the courage to do what God was asking him to do. He had to challenge God's people to return to God before they lost their nation. It wasn't easy.

Jeremiah had to indict the people. They had forgotten their history. They forgot how they followed by faith. They abandoned God for idols. No nation had changed their god before. Perhaps Judah thought following God was too hard. Just like sometimes people get divorced because working out the relationship is hard.

God expects us to live our faith on God's terms, which means our lives are to align with God's ethics. Goodness has to be at the core of our behavior. We cannot abandon God for gods who require nothing of us.

Is this getting too close for comfort? Are we also giving up on God and replacing God for a less demanding god? How are we measuring up? Abraham Lincoln said, "*America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.*"

God knows we need to hear the truth so that we can correct our ways. It took a man of integrity and courage to speak the truth. Jeremiah was in training to be a man who would *run with the horses*. This call is to speak for God without fear of the opposition, and we are all called to speak for God. It is not easy.

There's a proverb which goes back to the 1700's. "If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing well." When we endeavor to represent God, we need to do it well.

But there's another saying: "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly." G. K. Chesterton said it. He believed that the important thing was not the professional who can pull it off perfectly, but ordinary men. The reason is "an amateur is someone who does something out of love, not for money."¹ God chooses ordinary people to do worthy things. All he needs is for us to, well, be ordinary!

Jeremiah was that sort of man. He would deliver his message out of unadulterated love for God. God would take

¹ "A Thing Worth Doing," April 29, 2012, at <https://www.chesterton.org/a-thing-worth-doing/>, accessed September 5, 2019.

him way beyond what he thought he could do. He would learn to fight battles; to persist. He would *"run with the horses."*

Let's look at three men who were ordinary, but who had passion for God.

George Washington Carver was born in Missouri in 1865 to parents who were slaves. At one month of age, he and his mother were kidnapped. Her masters, Moses and Susan Carver, searched for them and found George, but not his mother. They raised George as their own. He called himself "Carver's George," but Mr. Carver insisted, no, you are *George Washington Carver*. By giving him that name, they painted for him a path of hope and even greatness, though he had many barriers to overcome. They taught him to read and write, to cook and garden, and when old enough, sent him to boarding school in Iowa. He was befriended by another white couple, John and Helen Milholland, who encouraged him to go to college. In 1894 he graduated with his bachelor's and in 1896, his master's. He got a job at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. His agricultural research led to practices that restored land and produced cash crops through peanut farming, revitalizing the depressed southern economy. Over the years he experienced multiple hardships as, one by one, he tackled these extraordinary things. Carver was a deeply religious man and he learned to run with horses. *None of his accomplishments were easy, but if it was easy, everybody would be doing it.* During the 1920s and 30s he traveled throughout the South to speak about racial harmony and equality.² Always frugal, over time he saved \$60,000. This would be equivalent to over \$1,000,000 today. He gave it all away. On his tombstone was written, "He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."

William Cameron Townsend was a Presbyterian. Around the time of WWI he was selling Bibles in Guatemala. He would put a cloth on the ground and display his Bibles. He would start a story and say, "if you want to hear the rest of it, you'll have to come back tomorrow." A man approached him and said, "If your God is so great, why doesn't he speak my language?" The remark left Townsend with a burden for the hundreds of people groups without Scripture in their language. He allowed this burden to change the course of his life. He started a linguistics school in Arkansas. In the first class, two showed up. *This would not be easy, but if it was easy, everyone would be doing it.* A man named Ken Pike joined the second class. He eventually became a member of FPCD. He got interested and the two men collaborated to accomplish this linguistic mission. Townsend told young men, "You guys are going to serve your country but how many of you are going to serve the Lord?" It started a whole new era in missions and gave indigenous people the ability to start their own churches. Then, in the 1970s, significant opposition arose against the translation work. Some South American countries even withdrew their contracts with SIL. So Townsend had to

overcome many difficult obstacles.³ But in 1981 Peru reversed their ban and Townsend was awarded the highest award that a foreigner can receive for SIL's work on Peru's minority language groups. Townsend pressed on because he believed "the greatest missionary is the Bible in the mother tongue. It needs no furlough and is never considered a foreigner."

H. Ross Perot gave his parents credit for laying the foundation for all of his later successes, a foundation of a deep faith in God, and the central value of family. He became an Eagle Scout at age 13 and credited the Scouts with teaching him to be a morally upright and responsible citizen, with a commitment to better the lives of his fellow man. He was a veteran in the Korean War. He valued what Teddy Roosevelt called "the man in the arena," the one who strives valiantly, with great courage, not standing on the sidelines. When he saw a problem, he stepped up and tried to fix it. His actions revealed his philosophy: "If not me, who? And if not now, when?" Ross had a special heart for helping veterans, including working to secure the freedom of POWs and funding research for illnesses caused by war. But he largely kept his efforts private. He was also deeply devoted to his employees, rescuing 2 held hostage in Tehran. As a child in the Depression, he witnessed his mother feeding strangers who would knock on their door. She told him, "These people are just like us but they are down on their luck." With that inspiration, he and Margot established the Perot Foundation with the goal of helping fund projects that would improve people's lives. They have contributed to First Presbyterian Church each time we have raised funds for Duncanville Outreach Ministry, and other community outreach in Duncanville. While he experienced great success during his career, above all else, Ross was devoted to his family. He was home each day at 6:30 for dinner. It was not easy to accomplish all he accomplished. But surely his father said, *Son, if it was easy everyone would be doing it.*⁴

I share the lives of these men because they were all ordinary men who did things that were not easy. Like Jeremiah they were committed to a deep foundation of faith. Through personal integrity and willingness to serve others, God blessed them and they accomplished extraordinary things. They *ran with the horses.*

There's one more thing you need to understand about this lesson. "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord."

What kind of man or woman do you want to be? How do you want your life shaped? God does not choose humans for their high achievements. In fact, God uses quite ordinary human beings. The outcome results when you put your passion for him on the front line.

AMEN

² "George Washington Carver," in The State Historic Society, Historic Missourians, at <https://historicmissourians.shsmo.org/historicmissourians/name/c/carver/>, accessed September 5, 2019.

³ "History of Missions: William Cameron Townsend, at <http://www.thetravelingteam.org/articles/william-cameron-townsend>, accessed September 5, 2019.

⁴ <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/dallas-tx/henry-perot-8774768>, accessed September 5, 2019.

Jeremiah 2:1-8

The LORD gave me another message. He said, ² "Go and shout this message to Jerusalem. This is what the LORD says: 'I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me and followed me even through the barren wilderness. ³ In those days Israel was holy to the LORD, the first of his children. All who harmed his people were declared guilty, and disaster fell on them. I, the LORD, have spoken!'

⁴ Listen to the word of the LORD, people of Jacob-- all you families of Israel! ⁵ This is what the LORD says: "What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves. ⁶ They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD who brought us safely out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness-- a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and death, where no one lives or even travels?' ⁷ "And when I brought you into a fruitful land to enjoy its bounty and goodness, you defiled my land and corrupted the possession I had promised you. ⁸ The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who taught my word ignored me, the rulers turned against me, and the prophets spoke in the name of Baal, wasting their time on worthless idols.

Compare Jeremiah 2:4-8 in *The Message (MSG)*

⁴⁻⁶ Hear GOD's Message, House of Jacob! Yes, you—House of Israel! GOD's Message: "What did your ancestors find fault with in me that they drifted so far from me, Took up with Sir Windbag and turned into windbags themselves? It never occurred to them to say, 'Where's GOD, the God who got us out of Egypt, Who took care of us through thick and thin, those rough-and-tumble wilderness years of parched deserts and death valleys, a land that no one who enters comes out of, a cruel, inhospitable land?' ⁷⁻⁸ "I brought you to a garden land where you could eat lush fruit. But you barged in and polluted my land, trashed and defiled my dear land. The priests never thought to ask, 'Where's GOD?' The religion experts knew nothing of me. The rulers defied me. The prophets preached god Baal and chased empty god-dreams and silly god-schemes.

2 Corinthians 5:14-18, 6:1

¹⁴ Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. ¹⁵ He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. ¹⁶ So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! ¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! ¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

¹ As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it.