

**Doing What I Can**  
**Jeremiah 1; Galatians 6**  
**Baraca and Anderson Place**  
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**TEASER**

I will do the best I can  
With what I have  
Where I am  
For Jesus' sake today.

This was the motto for Vacation Bible School some years ago.  
It's a good goal.  
It recognizes individual ability.  
It has well-defined geographic boundaries.  
It acknowledges Jesus as the One for whom we should do our best.  
Think of it again:  
I will do the best *I* can.  
I can't act for you.  
You can't act for me.  
I will do the best *I* can.  
I am ultimately responsible for what *I* do.  
You are ultimately responsible for what *you* do.  
I will do the best *I* can  
With what *I* have  
Not what somebody else has,  
With what *I* have.  
God didn't make us with a cookie cutter.  
I'm not quite like you.  
You're not quite like me.  
Our talents are different.  
I will do the best *I* can  
With what *I* have.  
I can't do much with what I *don't* have.  
But I am accountable for using what I *do* have.  
I will do the best *I* can  
With what *I* have  
Where *I* am.  
I can't be everywhere.  
But I can be *one* place,

And I can try to do my part in that one place.  
I can't take *your* place.  
I have *my* place.  
I will do the best *I* can  
With what *I* have  
Where *I* am  
For *Jesus'* sake today.

That is our challenge as Christians:  
To do what we do for the sake of our Lord.  
That takes away selfish ambition.  
That purifies our motives.  
I will do the best *I* can  
With what *I* have  
Where *I* am  
For Jesus' sake *today*.  
Do we need to remind ourselves?  
Today is all we have.  
If you ever intend to do something good,  
It must be done *today*.  
It can't be done *yesterday*.  
It can't be done *tomorrow*.  
If you do it *tomorrow*, that tomorrow will be *today* when it gets here.  
I will do the best *I* can  
With what *I* have  
Where *I* am  
For Jesus' sake *today*.

### **Transition to Bible Passages**

We look this morning at two Bible passages which deal with doing what we can for God.

The first passage is the call that came to Jeremiah. This is from the opening verses of the book which bears the prophet Jeremiah's name.

In the second passage -- from the Letter to the Galatians -- Paul calls on the Christians of Galatia to do their best for one another in the name of Jesus.

When the call comes, Jeremiah tells the Lord, "My best isn't that good." But God will have none of it. God says, "I know all about you, Jeremiah. I've known you from the time you were formed in your mother's womb. You can do what I need you to do."

In the Galatians passage, Paul talks in practical terms of how Christians can help one another. There's no backtalk from the Galatians recorded as we have from

Jeremiah, but if you listen closely, you can probably hear the negative buzz in the background.

## **Jeremiah 1**

So, let's look at Jeremiah's call to be a spokesman for God.

The first verse indicates that we have >>>>>>>>>>

*1: The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilki'ah, of the priests who were in An'athoth in the land of Benjamin,*

This seems to indicate Jeremiah was from a priestly family (Green 3).

Verses 2-3 mention three kings during Jeremiah's time as a prophet. Jeremiah's initial awareness of God's call came in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah. This king was on the throne 31 years, so under Josiah, Jeremiah prophesied 18 years.

Of the other two listed here, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, each was king eleven years. This means Jeremiah's ministry extended some 40 years: 18 years under Josiah, 11 under Jehoiakim, and 11 more under Zedekiah. There were actually two other kings during this period -- Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin -- on the throne only about three months apiece. So we still come in about 40 years for Jeremiah's time as a prophet.

Jeremiah says his time extended to the 11th year of Zedekiah. The Jewish leader class were taken into exile in Babylon in Zedekiah's 11th year. So without saying it here, Jeremiah indicates he ended his prophecies about coming destruction when the destruction came.

It's insightful for us to know the political situation during the time Jeremiah preached. I suggested a moment ago, this was a time of political upheaval. With the prophet's eye, Jeremiah saw destruction coming for his nation, and he said so. You may recall we had a lesson or two from Jeremiah back in the summer (June 2004). The prophet nearly got himself executed because he preached doom and gloom (chapter 26).

We see in verses 4-5 Jeremiah's first awareness of God's call:

*4: Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

The Lord may have known all about Jeremiah before he was even formed in the womb, but it's a safe bet that if Jeremiah could have looked across the years to see the danger he would face personally and see the fate of his beloved country, he would have resisted even more than he tells us here.

With his limited knowledge of what is likely to come, Jeremiah in verse 6 begs off because he's too young.

But in verse 7, the Lord says that's not good enough. You will go where I send you, and I will give you the words you need. Then we hear this word of assurance to Jeremiah and to us in verse 8:

*8: Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."*

Jeremiah's awareness of the Lord is so strong, it is as if God speaks with a human voice. Not only that, in verse 9, it is as if God has a human hand and reaches out to touch Jeremiah's mouth, giving him the power and giving him the message:

*9: Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."*

With God's voice ringing in his ear and with God's touch on his lips, Jeremiah can say,

I will do the best I can  
With what I have  
Where I am  
For God's sake today.

On the "Where I am," Jeremiah moves in the circles of power. His family is among those leader-type families. He has the ear of kings. So God says in verse 10:

*10: See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

The rest of this chapter tells two visions as Jeremiah reflects on God's call. Professor Leo Green suggests Jeremiah is on a walk, trying to fathom God's stirring in his life (29). As he walks, Jeremiah has two simple objects come to life for his preaching:

Verse 11:

*11: And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, [an almond in early bloom]."*

It would help here if we knew a little Hebrew, Jeremiah's language. This word about the almond in early bloom is *shah-ked*. *Shah-ked*.

That's important because we see two words in Hebrew here which are very similar. In verse 12, you have *sho-ked*. *Shoh-ked*. This means early watching.

*12: Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching [early] over my word to perform it."*

The early bloom *Shah-ked* reminds Jeremiah of early watch: *Shoh-ked*.

Jeremiah continues his walk after he sees the almond tree, and next he sees an old black pot over a fire, and the pot is boiling like crazy. The pot is tilted so the liquid is about to pour out. The higher side of the pot is on the north side, and the lower side is on the south.

It doesn't take a prophet's eye to see that the pot is about to boil over and to know that the contents of a boiling pot can scald anything or anybody who gets in the way of the flow of liquid.

You might need a prophet's eye to see the symbolism in this boiling pot, but it reminds Jeremiah his southern kingdom is in danger of the boiling wrath of nations to the north. Verses 13-16:

*13: The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north." 14: Then the LORD said to me, "Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. 15: For, lo, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says the LORD; and they shall come and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah. 16: And I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have burned incense to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.*

Jeremiah quakes in his sandals, but the inner voice tells him in verse 17 to gird up his loins. Men wore long skirts in those times, so if a man needed to run or move in a hurry, he would gather his robes about him so he wouldn't trip over them (Green 31).

In verses 18-19, the Lord says Jeremiah will face tough times, but the Lord will make Jeremiah strong. Notice three comparisons of strength.

As Jeremiah does the best he can with what he has where he is for God's sake, he will become like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls -- three symbols of strength.

I've told you about an action figure somebody gave our younger son Jonathan when he was a kid. G. I. Joe was supposed to say a bunch of different things when you pulled his string,

Turns out, for the first day or so, all we could get the blasted thing to say was, "I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you."

Finally, G. I. Joe's voice came un-stuck, and Jonathan got him to say other things, but Jeremiah this time heard G. I. Joe's message from God: "I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you."

Well, as we think of doing the best we can with what we have where we are for Jesus' sake today, we probably won't have as tough assignment as Jeremiah faced.

Bob, have you been called on to tell the Governor what to expect if he doesn't do right?

Jack, have you been called on to tell the President what to expect if he doesn't shape up?

Probably not. But we need to hear God's promise that he will make us tough to face the things he needs us to do. If we are obedient, God can make us like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls

## Galatians 6:1-10

We may need that same kind of reinforcement strength if we try to obey the instructions from our New Testament passage in Galatians 6:1-10. As we consider this passage, I'm going to start with verse 10. Paul uses it as a final summary verse, but it can also serve as a keynote verse.

*10: So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men [and women], and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

The way we do that, according to Paul, is to have a loving, generous, forgiving, non-judgmental spirit toward others as we deal with Christian brothers or sisters who have strayed away from Christ or those who are bearing heavy personal burdens.

Verse 1 deals with our attitude toward someone in open sin:

*1: Brothers and sisters, if a person is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore that person in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

Just how far should we take that?

What about lying? Are we willing to restore a liar caught in a lie *in a spirit of gentleness?*

What about stealing? Are we willing to restore a thief caught in his thieving *in a spirit of gentleness?*

What about adultery? Are we willing to restore an adulterer caught in the act of adultery *in a spirit of gentleness?*

What about someone on drugs? Are we willing to restore a druggie caught with the drugs *in a spirit of gentleness?*

What sin is so great that you would not try to help someone make a comeback, if that person had been caught in the very act, whatever the act may be?

One possible reading of this verse is to start with "even" (Erdman 126). That is,

*Brothers and sisters, even if a person is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore that person in a spirit of gentleness.*

Let's think a minute about the idea of restoring [ ] the sinner.

One meaning of the word for restore is to mend or fix or repair ( [ ] Thayer 336). The word is used to describe mending a fish net so it can be restored to use in fishing. It also describes setting a broken arm or leg in order for that limb to be restored to its function (Erdman 126).

Paul then puts forth the Golden Rule as a reason for working to restore a fallen brother or sister:

*Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

If you commit such a sin and are discovered, you will desire this same restoration by your fellow Christians.

He elaborates on that in verses 3-4. But first consider the key to this attitude that leads us to restore the sinner *in a spirit of gentleness*. The key is a deep desire to help other people. Verse 2:

*2: Bear one another's burdens [λλλλκ | < ®<| ®< ( |Γ(], and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Again, put yourself in the other person's shoes. Don't imagine for a minute that you are above the possibility of falling into sin:

*3: For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4: But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.*

Paul has said a moment ago that we should *bear one another's burdens*.

But when it comes down to self-examination, he says in verse 5,

*5: For each [of us] will have to bear [our] own load.*

No one else can do your self-examination for you. At that point, you have to carry your own load. As the old spiritual says, "Nobody else can walk it for you."

Paul then in verse 6 mentions another aspect of bearing one another's burden:

*6: Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches.*

To put that succinctly, "Pay the preacher." If people devote their time and energies to teaching and preaching, look out for them. Provide them a decent living.

The next two verses contain probably the best-known single statement in the book of Galatians. That statement in brief is:

*Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

That is a valid principle for all of life, but Paul ties that principle in with the spirit of generosity he is dealing with in this passage. The larger statement is in verses 7-8:

*7: Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8: For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

This has been called the "Principle of Seed Time and Harvest." We can -- and should -- bear one another's burdens in many areas of life, but in the final analysis, we have to live with the consequences of our own acts, good and bad, just as a farmer has to live with what he plants.

This Principle of Seed Time and Harvest points back to the previous chapter of Galatians where Paul has two contrasting lists, one citing results of the life devoted to the fleshly or non-spiritual life, the other citing results of the life devoted to the spirit.

Remember, the Bible wasn't written in chapters and verses. Those divisions didn't come until just a few hundred years ago. So the sowing and reaping refers to the harvest of sin and the fruit of the Spirit.

In chapter 5, Paul says,

*19: Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,*

*20: idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, 21: envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

In terms of the Principle of Seed Time and Harvest, if we sow these wild oats, we will be a bumper crop of corruption and separation from the kingdom of God.

By contrast, Paul says,

*22: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23: gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.*

In terms of the Principle of Seed Time and Harvest, if we sow to the Spirit of God, then Paul says there will be a bumper crop of these blessings of our inner life.

Even if our commitment is to God and the Spirit of Christ, we sometimes grow tired. So Paul continues the sowing and reaping analogy in verse 9:

*9: And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.*

## **CONCLUSION**

Whether our service to God is in the great spectacular political arena where we confront people of great authority, or whether we labor in more routine paths that don't draw the headlines, we may hear the monotonous repetition from G. I. Joe:

"I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you. I have a tough assignment for you"

Whether we go grocery shopping for a person who can no longer drive,  
Or listen quietly as someone sobs out a story of loneliness or religious doubt,  
Through it all, we can make our resolution that -- with God's help --

I will do the best I can  
With what I have  
Where I am  
For Jesus' sake today.

## **BENEDICTION**

Now, as we conclude this week's Baraca Sunday School Class, I challenge you to listen with Jeremiah for what God is trying to get you to hear, and with Paul seek to develop a caring, forgiving spirit. To speed you on your way, claim these promises:

God's love that will never let you go.  
God's grace that is greater than all your sin.  
God's peace that passes all understanding.  
These are yours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **SOURCES:**

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Joseph Henry Thayer, "ἰσχυρῶς," *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1976.

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