

***Jeremiah 1:4-10***

I'd like to tell you the story of 2 children. The parents of the first child were somewhat mismatched. His father was unemployed with no formal schooling. His mother was a teacher.

This child, born in Port Huron, Michigan, was estimated to have an IQ of 81. He was withdrawn from school after 3 months --and was considered backward by school officials.

The child enrolled in school 2 years late due to scarlet fever and respiratory infections. And he was going deaf. His emotional health was poor. He was stubborn, aloof, and showed very little emotion. He liked mechanics. He also liked to play with fire and burned down his father's barn. He showed some manual dexterity, but used very poor grammar. But he did want to be a scientist or a railroad mechanic.

The 2nd child showed not much more promise either. This child was born of an alcoholic father. As a child she was sickly, bedridden, and often hospitalized. She was considered erratic and withdrawn. She would bite her nails and had numerous phobias. She wore a back brace from a spinal defect and would constantly seek attention.

She was a daydreamer with no vocational goals, although she expressed a desire to help the elderly and the poor.

Who were these 2 children?

The boy from Port Huron became one of the world's greatest inventors--Thomas A. Edison. And the awkward and sickly young girl became a champion of the oppressed--Eleanor Roosevelt. Would you have voted either one of these children, "most likely to succeed?" Probably not.

Geologists tell us that only 3% of the Earth's fresh water is on the surface in the form of rivers and lakes. The other 97% remains as a huge subterranean reservoir down below. The potentials of human personality are much the same--only 3% on the surface and 97% below. How do we tap the infinite reservoir unseen? How do we bring to the surface the powers and possibilities the Creator has placed within each of us?

One thing we can do is to rid our vocabularies of three deadly words. They were the words spoken by a young man long ago by

the name of Jeremiah. God came to Jeremiah and said to him, "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."

"But, LORD," Jeremiah said, "I do not know how to speak." Then Jeremiah spoke those 3 deadly words, **"I AM ONLY...."** In Jeremiah's case, he said, "I am only a youth."

Jeremiah would become one of the greatest prophets that God called, but first of all God had to deal with those 3 deadly words, "I am only..."

### **MANY OF US ARE LIMITED BY THOSE THREE WORDS AS WELL.**

If God came to some people in this room today, someone would say, "But Lord, I'm only a senior citizen. I'm too old to be of much use to the kingdom."

There was a story in the WALL STREET JOURNAL about Harry Lipsig. Lipsig, at age eighty-eight, decided to leave the New York law firm he had spent most of 60 years building up. He decided to open a new firm. So at an age when many people have given up on life, Mr. Lipsig decided to try his first case in some time. Here was the situation.

A lady was suing the city of New York because a drunken police officer had struck and killed her 71-year-old husband with his patrol car. She argued that the city had deprived her of her husband's future earnings potential. The city argued that at age 71, he had little earnings potential.

They thought they had a pretty clever defense until they realized that this lady's argument about her husband's future earning power was being advanced by a vigorous 88-year-old attorney. The city settled the case for \$1.25 million. What if Harry Lipsig had said, "I'm only a senior citizen?"

Someone else might answer, "But Lord, I'm only a woman."

You may have heard the story about 3 men walking down a beach that came across a lamp buried in the sand. They picked it up and began wiping it off. A genie popped out and told them, "I'll grant each of you one wish."

The first man rubbed the lamp and whispered, "I wish I were 10

times smarter."

"You are now 10 times smarter," announced the genie.

The 2nd guy took the lamp and rubbed it and murmured, "I wish I were a hundred times smarter."

"You are now a hundred times smarter," the genie mandated.

The 3rd man rubbed the lamp and said, "I wish I were a thousand times smarter."

The genie pointed at him and declared, "You are now a woman."

I hope there is no one in this church who still believes that women cannot compete with men. The 2 highest IQs ever recorded (on a standard test) both belonged to women. It is not intelligence or ability or competence that have held women back. It is these 3 deadly words, "I am only..."

One little girl prayed earnestly: "Dear God, are little boys really better than little girls?" After a brief pause, as if waiting for an answer, she added, "I know you are one, but please be fair."

In a hundred different ways we have told our little girls they are not as capable as little boys. And that is wrong! Of course, we are making progress. We know that by contrasting the status of American women with women worldwide.

For example, when they first started showing the television show, "Laverne and Shirley" in Thailand, there was a stark conflict of cultures. The idea of independent, unmarried young women living apart from their families goes against Thai culture. For that reason, the government TV network preceded each episode with a slide informing the public that the series was about 2 women who had escaped from a lunatic asylum.

We've got a long way to go, but progress is being made. You may have heard about a man and a woman who were chatting. "Yes," she said. "I'm the kind of woman who spends a lot of time talking to my plants. Let's see--there's my computer plant in Chicago, my textile plant in North Carolina...."

Every child in this world--male or female, black or white, yellow or brown--should grow up believing 2 things about themselves: they are loved and they are capable.

Let's get rid of the "I am only's..." I am only the child of a coal miner, I am only a person with a handicapping condition, I am only a member of a minority group. You and I can be anything God calls us to be. And God is calling everyone of us just as he called Jeremiah.

God came to Jeremiah and said to him, "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."

"But, LORD," Jeremiah said, "I do not know how to speak. I am only a youth."

See what God does next. He says to Jeremiah, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. Then the LORD reaches out His hand and touches Jeremiah's mouth and says to him, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth.

See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

God had great plans for Jeremiah, but first of all He had to get those 3 deadly words off of Jeremiah's lips, "I am only ..." And, my friends, God has great plans for your life and my life as well.

Norman Vincent Peale tells about a young man named Mike. Mike's school attendance and grades were worsening, and he was developing a surly disposition....He was exhorted, lectured, and punished, but to no avail. Finally, he landed in the superintendent's office with the teacher's recommendation that he be expelled from school as unreachable and therefore unteachable.

The superintendent talked to Mike but was obviously getting nowhere. To Mike's surprise the superintendent said, "Mike, hold out your hands....Mike, you've got wonderful hands, long and slender but strong, which is surprising for your stocky build. Boy, you've got the hands of a surgeon. Maybe that's what you are intended to be. Get going, Mike, and good luck."

He said nothing about punishment, let alone expulsion. It was genuine motivation, esteem, and admiration.

Mike became, in the words of the superintendent, "one of the best

surgeons" in the land.

All Mike needed was someone to offer a word of encouragement -- to tell him what he might be. Many of us need that same kind of encouragement. We need a friend who will say to us, "Don't say, 'I'm only this' or 'I'm only that.' I've got great plans for you."

We have such a friend in God. He sees possibilities within us we never dreamed possible. If we believe in Him and if we believe in His dream for our lives, we can accomplish more than we ever dreamed possible.

In art class some children were working with plasticine, a clay-like substance that can be used over and over because it does not harden. A girl had made a very nice model of a creature with wings. She held it up and said to everyone, "See the angel!" There were exclamations of delight from the class and teacher. Then the girl quickly molded the angel back into a ball and asked everyone, "Okay, now. What's this?" Nobody could answer--except to say, "a ball?"

"Nope," said the girl, "it's a hiding angel."

The next day when the children came into art class, they were accompanied by a visitor. Another child pointed at the ball of plasticine and said to the visitor, "You know what that is? It's a hiding angel."

Some of us have within us hiding angels just waiting to be released. And they can be released when, like Jeremiah, we discover that rather than only a youth, or only a senior citizen, or only a woman, or only a child of poverty, we can say, "I am a child of God. Before I was formed in the womb God knew me. Before I was born I was set apart for something good and beautiful and noble."

To believe that about ourselves is to unleash a host of powers and possibilities. Like Thomas Edison and Eleanor Roosevelt, those 2 young people for whom no one would have predicted extraordinary success--our lives can become something beautiful and good. Let God touch your lips this day and take off from them those words that hold you back. Say rather, "I am a child of God."