

**“Trusting in the Future”**  
**Third in the Series Keeping the Faith**  
Jeremiah 1:4-10, 17-19

Jeremiah didn't know much of anything about his future except - that he didn't have much choice in the matter. *“Before I formed you in the womb,”* says God, *“I knew you. Before you were even born, I set you apart and dedicated you to a particular purpose. And – like it or not - I appointed you a prophet to the nations,”* (paraphrase of vv5-6).

When Jeremiah receives this call from God – he immediately interrupts God, *“Oh – you must have me confused with that other guy Jeremiah down the street – the one who's graduated already...I'm Jeremiah. I'm just a boy. I don't even know how to speak to my peers – let alone entire populations! Here let me go get you that other guy's address...”* (paraphrase of v6).

When God tells Jeremiah what Jeremiah's future holds...that he's “appointed over nations and kingdoms to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and overthrow, and to build and to plant” (v10) – Jeremiah doesn't realize that all the refuting in the world can't and won't change his future. Why? Because **God was around in Jeremiah's past** (all the way back to the womb), **God is**

**obviously with him in the present** – comforting him, telling him not to be afraid and telling him what to expect, **and God assures Jeremiah that he will be with him in the future** – *“I am going to tell you where to go and I'm going to give you my words so you don't have to worry about what to say...oh - and I will deliver you,”* (v7-8).

This is all fine and good, but if I'm Jeremiah, it's that last little bit that would shake my faith in God's grand plan. *“And I will deliver you.”* Those five words indicate something foreboding about Jeremiah's future. Because if God says he's going to deliver Jeremiah that means that Jeremiah *is going to need to be delivered* – as in, he's going to be in sticky situations, doing dangerous things, and saying things that people don't like to hear – as prophets are prone to do.

We heard another prophet say things we don't like to hear last week. Remember Jesus' words? Among them, *“Do not worry about tomorrow... (never mind the fact that I'm about to cause all kinds of division in your life and in your family)...don't be anxious.”* Now

Jesus was older than Jeremiah when he said these words, but both of these prophets ended up living lives that required them to trust the future without worrying about their fate.

Jesus and Jeremiah fall in a long line of good company. Remember back to Hebrews 11 – how *by faith* all of their ancestors had stepped forward into the future despite their fears and frustrations? I know what you're thinking - but Anne, these are all "Bible" people. What normal person today can face the future without *any* fear? Is that even possible? Well, God thinks it is.

And apparently so does Tim Tebow. An article in the July issue of the magazine 5280 entitled, "The Second Coming," reports on the Denver Broncos new 2<sup>nd</sup> string/3<sup>rd</sup> string quarterback:

Tim Tebow isn't just carrying the weight of his own legend, though; he's also carrying the weight of an entire franchise, and an entire city. It is more pressure than any athlete should have to bear, let alone one facing legitimate questions about his ability to play at the highest level. Yet his facial expression never changes. He looks like the exact same hero, the exact same *winner*, he was at Florida. What are we missing here? What is *he* missing here?

"You have to believe in yourself, in everything, or you have nothing," Tebow says. "Nothing is certain. You have to be a realist and realize nothing is certain. But I

feel like I know what I'm doing, and I just want to get better."

"Football is just a platform for me," he says, alluding to his very public faith. "The games are a bonus. But I also recognize that to keep that platform, I have to perform. I think Denver fans will see how willing I am to work hard to make sure I keep it." He pauses. "I think I can make that work."

And there it is, plainly stated, appropriately humble and yet supremely confident. What, or where, does this come from? Does it come from the fact that he has always been told he was a golden boy—the Golden Boy—and he can't understand a universe in which he isn't the best? Or does it come from within, from his God, from an inner confidence that only he understands?

An American icon, in the prime of his life, conqueror of all that he has ever surveyed, is now the Christian being thrown into the lion's den. He has been handed the future of the Broncos. It's all on his shoulders. It's a big moment in Denver. Does Tim Tebow look nervous to you? He doesn't look nervous to me.<sup>1</sup>

Whoa. According to this writer, Jeremiah could learn a lot from Tim Tebow about facing the future with faith! But, we have to be careful when we have confidence in our future...making sure it comes from Christ and not cultural acclaim or cockiness.

That said, last night's and last week's losses aside, the Broncos have created a buzz across the NFL landscape. The

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<sup>1</sup> Will Leitch, "The Second Coming," 5280 (July 2010).

pessimism of last year's Jay Cutler departure has been replaced by the optimistic light that is Tebow's arrival. Tebow has been dubbed, by some, the "Mile High Messiah," and this shouldn't surprise us since ESPN named Tebow "The Chosen One" before he even played a down in college.

And - he's got the backing of John Elway too, *"I'm excited; I'm excited for him, obviously he's a great kid, great character, and a guy that's going to work his tail off and be a great example for everybody else. He's got the potential, he won at the college ranks, and won the Heisman, so there is talent there, there's a want there. I think we have a great competitor so that gives us hope."*<sup>2</sup>

*"Within the next five years, Tim clearly has a chance to be one of the most endorsable athletes on the planet,"* Sexton [Tebow's endorsement agent] said. *"I had one CEO of a major Fortune 500 company tell me, 'You know what, Jimmy? For a corporation to put a face on their brand, this guy (Tebow) is the real deal. He's the one guy who's not going to be a scandal two or three years from now."*

Given the disappointing losses last

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<sup>2</sup> Omar Brown, "Denver Broncos: Check Out Tim Tebow's New Nike Sneakers," *Bleacher Report* (July 13, 2010). Accessed on 15 August 2010 at <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/419805-denver-broncos-check-out-tim-tebows-new-nike-sneakers>.

night and last week – who knows what will become of the Broncos this season – and of Tim Tebow. I have hope. And I know I'd hear from you, Calvary, if I didn't!

It's clear that despite what people say about him, Tim Tebow has some kind of centeredness about him. Some kind of ability to trust in the future without becoming too anxious about things that are out of his control. Does that make him a Messiah figure? No. But it does make him an interesting guy in a professional sport's world that is all about analyzing one's past performance as a way of predicting his future potential.

Tebow's confidence in his future seems to be rooted not just in his past performance but also his dream, or "call," if you will, from a very early age. *"I want to be a quarterback in the NFL for a great many years,"* Tebow said in a teleconference. *"That's my goal. That's been my goal since I was 6 years old. I want to do whatever it takes to get there. I'm just grateful to Coach McDaniels to have the strength and belief in me, to choose me and believe in me. I'm so thankful for that."*<sup>3</sup>

Tebow may be grateful that Josh McDaniels believes in him...and we,

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<sup>3</sup> Mike Klis, "Broncos make shock waves by drafting QB Tim Tebow," *The Denver Post* (23 April 2010). Accessed on 22 August 2010 at [http://www.denverpost.com/timtebow/ci\\_14941741](http://www.denverpost.com/timtebow/ci_14941741).

as Christians, must be grateful that God believes in us. And this is where Jeremiah just isn't quite there yet. He's not quite at the point of being grateful to God for believing in him and his prophetic potential. He thinks God is crazy.

In today's text we are catching Jeremiah at the beginning of his journey of faith and life, so we don't have a past to help us predict how his future will go. And neither does he! But what Jeremiah doesn't know we, the reader, do come to know: that his prophetic career was during one of the most critical times in the history of Israel – from the religious and societal reform of Josiah through the downfall of Judah and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and then, into what would become the seemingly endless time of exile for the Israelites. And all of this was on the heels of mass chaos in surrounding nations – the demise of Assyria's power and control initiated conflict in Egypt and Babylon and other surrounding nations as everyone began vying for power.<sup>4</sup>

Any twinge of envy we might have in reading the call of Jeremiah – and wishing that God would speak to us that clearly – should be offset by the fact that God is sending Jeremiah into

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick D. Miller, "The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* Vol. VI (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2001), pg 555-556.

a lifetime of uphill battles, where he will say unpopular things, and face unparalleled opposition, and experience countless "*dark nights of the soul*."<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah will lament to God frequently throughout his lifetime, saying such things as,

My joy is gone, grief is upon me,  
my heart is sick.  
Is the Lord not in Zion?  
For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,  
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.  
Is there no balm in Gilead?  
Is there no physician there?  
Why then has the health of my poor people  
not been restored?  
O that my head were a spring of water,  
and my eyes a fountain of tears...<sup>6</sup>

However, the presence of doubt, albeit strong and longlasting, is not tantamount to abandonment – for we know from our biblical fathers and mothers as well as those who have gone before us in this Christian tradition that deep and authentic confusion, fear, and struggle are part of faith and inevitably come before one has ultimate union with God.

It takes a lot to trust in the future, and to trust God enough to walk forward

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<sup>5</sup> We get the term "dark night of the soul" from St. John of the Cross, a sixteenth century Spanish mystic and Carmelite priest. He wrote a poem depicting his spiritual crisis in his journey towards union with God. Typically for a believer in the dark night of the soul, traditional prayer is extremely difficult and unrewarding for an extended period of time during this "dark night." The individual may feel as though God has suddenly abandoned them or that his or her prayer life has collapsed.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 8:18-22, selected portions, NRSV.

in faith and not fear.

**The future of our planet** seems precarious, especially with tragic disasters like the BP oil spill, with changes in ecosystems because of global warming, and with an increasing number of natural disasters.

**The future of our country** can easily be driven by fear and not faith. With all the debate about whether or not a mosque should be built near Ground Zero in New York City, it seems like we're letting the actions of extremists and terrorists truly scare us out of preserving the freedoms our country was built upon...and one that we Baptists uphold very highly – the freedom of religion and the freedom of people to worship where and how they want.

**The future of our state** seems to be at a high point of anticipation as November elections approach to elect either Republican Ken Buck or Democrat Michael Bennett to join Mark Udall in being an advocate for Colorado in the U.S. Senate.

And it hits even closer to home too.

**The future of our American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountain Region** depends upon congregations being willing to actively look forward to where Christ is calling us, instead of avoiding the conversation because

we're comfortable as we are.

**The future of Calvary Baptist Church of Denver** is bright because the Spirit is moving in each of us and among all of us – and Calvary, you are responding with faith in your giving of money, time, and talents. But as we continue to walk forward in faith – we will be challenged and stretched even more – and may those moments be points of transformation rather than stagnation or separation.

**The future of each of our lives** is always shifting and is somewhat uncertain. Most of our high school seniors moved into their freshman dorms this week...which means their parents had to say goodbye and trust that their love, guidance, and discipline over the past 18 years will continue to nurture their newly independent “adult” child. And as each senior no doubt walked onto a new campus with nervous butterflies as well as excitement...I know you parents walked back into homes where things are a lot quieter now. We have several new empty-nest-ers this year – and as you navigate this year into the future, you'll be figuring out how to live in this new stage of life. There might be some fear there – but from what I've heard – there's a lot of freedom too.

Others in our church family are experiencing changes at home, not because of kids going off to college –

but because of lost jobs or cut pay at work. Trusting the future when your finances are tight and/or shrinking is a huge adjustment – fiscally but also emotionally and spiritually.

Our older church family members are experiencing change at a faster pace as they move into the future. Joints ache. Bones break more easily. Minds get confused. Healthy cells are more susceptible to disease and decay. Eye sight is strained or lost, and hearing begins to fail. Stepping into the future for you means trusting that God will never fail you even as it seems your body is beginning to.

**Each of us could name something about our future that makes it hard for us to trust God without worrying.**

But Calvary – where one of us is weak – another is strong. What one of us is facing – another has already gone through. What one of us lacks – another has in abundance. We are the Body of Christ – and as such we walk forward in the future – not alone – but connected by a God whose call will always challenge us – but whose love will never fail us.

Hopefully in this sermon series you've been encouraged that *by faith* our ancestors made it through the trials and the celebrations of life. And hopefully you've been reminded that Jesus came to be with us – here and

now in the present – to teach us that living by faith is not passive – but is rather a series of active choices we must make again and again to live with love toward God, ourselves, and one another. And Jesus warned us in Luke that with such commitment comes division and sacrifice.

So what does *Jeremiah* teach us about “keeping the faith?”

Well, the call of Jeremiah reminds us that before we were even born, as we are continually being created, shaped, and formed, and as we go out into the world each day to go where God leads – God goes behind us, before us, and beside us. But again – God's presence doesn't automatically make faith easy. The last words God says to Jeremiah in his call (before he actually starts giving him his prophetic assignments) are: “*Boy – gird up your loins; stand tall and tell them everything I command you. Don't break down before these people. Remember I've fortified you – like an iron pillar and a bronze wall – you stand firm against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and all the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail. For I am with you. And I will deliver you,*” (vv17-19 paraphrased).

We can believe in ourselves because God believes in us.

Calvary – let's keep going forward in faith together. We have no reason not

to trust the God of our forefathers and mothers, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the God of the Holy Spirit which has been moving in us since our beginning – is moving in us now – and will guide us to great places in the future.

Amen.