

Well, good morning. It's a real privilege to be with you. Thank you for that introduction, Dean Gordon. Thank you, worship guys, for leading us. I think there's no more appropriate song than that one that we just sang in today's world and in what we're dealing with and what we're seeing happen all around us. I know it's affected you all greatly. These events have particular effects on college campuses, particularly Christian college campuses. So don't lose the fact that it's a great privilege in times like this to be able to gather like this, to worship like this, and to be able to sing about how good our God is and that he's seated on the throne in heaven. So thank you. I wanted to also thank Dr. Williams for giving me the opportunity, the privilege to be here with you all. As was mentioned, I am an alum. It is a blessing to be back here. It's a real privilege to stand in front of you. We're going to be in Jeremiah Chapter 1, if you have your Bibles, which I hope you do, or your phones or something that you can look at God's word with We'll be in Jeremiah 1 in just a minute.

I want to just introduce a little bit more about myself. Whenever I hear somebody speak, I always like to know a little bit about them, and most of you probably have no idea who I am. So I want to just mention a few brief things. I did go to Cairn, it was then PCB, until 1998. I met my wife here after we were out of school, working at the university. We've been married for 25 years this year. We have four children. My oldest son, Devon, is a Houghton University graduate. My other son, Cameron, is a sophomore here, Cairn, and we are blessed that he's here. We have two daughters. My daughter Shay is a senior in high school, and my daughter, Trinity, is a freshman in high school in Syracuse as well. We also have one Australian shepherd named Lincoln. So there you know a little bit about me. I am privileged to be able to look into God's word with you this morning.

Jeremiah chapter one, we're going to talk today about excuses and promises. And one of the things that we have to be aware of in our world is that when God calls us to something, excuses are typically as human beings and as fallen and broken human beings, the first thing that comes to mind.

We see this throughout all of scripture. Most biblical characters, when God puts a call on their life and even specifically speaks directly to them, they have some reasons why they should not be the one, right? Why they should not be the one to do what God has called them to do, why it would be better for someone else. But I think the events of our current world, and particularly of the last couple of days, would tell us this, if not you, then who? God has put a call on each of your lives. If you're here, I don't presume to think that I would know everybody's story in this room, or that you even all know Jesus as your personal savior yet. I pray that you do or that you will very soon. But for everyone who does, particularly young people, God wants you to go to do great things for him. It'll look varied. It'll look different. We see that throughout scripture. The examples are all over the place and how God wants to use his people. But when we look at Jeremiah, particularly in God's call on his life, he was a young person when God called him.

Most scholars think he was in the 20 to 25-year-old range. He was a young adult. He had done things. He had served in different ways, but God had called him to lead. Excuses are things that come to our mind when we focus on ourselves and not on the God that we serve. Because we can all find excuses not to do what God has called us to do. Things like, it's not my gift, that's someone else's gift. Things like, that should be the pastor's job, not mine. Things like, aren't there professionals to handle that? Or I've already served in another way. I shouldn't need to do more. I'm too busy, or I'm too tired, or I'm too old, or I'm too young. We can come up with a million excuses. It's been said that excuses are the tools of the incompetent. Those who specialize in excuses seldom go very far in life. Ben Franklin wrote at one point, "He that is good at making excuses is seldom good for anything else." And as we think about that human wisdom, how much better is it to look at scriptural wisdom that drives us to follow through on the things that God has called us to do?

Jeremiah had every excuse when God called him to be ready to be a prophet. His excuses were often the same as ours. He had challenges heeding God's voice. Countering each excuse that we see in Jeremiah 1, God gives a promise to offset that excuse. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. Jeremiah 1. I'm going to read verses 4 through 9, and then after that, I'm going to read verses 17 through 19. Look at those two sections with us. Let's read together. Jeremiah 1:4: "Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you. I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations. Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God,

behold, I do not know how to speak, for I'm only a youth. ' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I'm only a youth, for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. 'Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord. Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, And the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."

Verse 17 of chapter one says, ""But you dress yourself for work. Arise, say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar in bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you."

We see a number of Jeremiah's excuses when God called them to be a prophet. Being a prophet in ancient days was a very unique task, and it was different than Jeremiah had grown up with. Jeremiah's family was a family of priests. And priests and prophets are two different roles. If God, I think, had said to Jeremiah, Jeremiah, you're going to be a priest, he would have probably been a little more inclined. It would have been familiar. He would have known how that works. He could have gone to his family members and his dad to ask questions about that and get insight. But to be called to be a prophet meant something a little riskier, a little farther out than he had been accustomed to.

A prophet in ancient times was a chosen and authorized spokesman for God who declared God's word to the people. We often think of prophets who are people who could tell the future, But that really wasn't the task. The task of a prophet was to speak messages in the present that had future implications. Truth in the present that affected the future. They were more truth tellers than they were future tellers, exposing people's sins, calling them back to their covenant responsibilities before God. Not a popular topic. Being a prophet was more demanding, I think, than being a priest. It was riskier than being a priest. The priest duties were predictable. You knew what to do, you knew when to do it, you knew how to do it. It was all written down. You just follow the script. The prophet, on the other hand, had to step out in faith not knowing what might next, not knowing how people would respond, maybe not even knowing what he was going to say when he got there, but relying on the Lord to guide and direct him. The priest worked primarily to preserve the past. The prophet labored to change the present so that the nation would have a future.

How poignant is that in today's day with what we've just watched happen and play out in our society? Speaking to the present so that there is a future in following God. Priests dealt with external things, rituals and sacrifices and offerings and services that needed to come to God's people, while prophets tried to reach the heart and change the soul of people. Priests ministered daily to individuals with various needs. Prophets, on the other hand, addressed whole nations, whole people groups. Usually the people they addressed didn't want to hear what they had to say at all. But God had sent them to say it. The priests belonged to a special tribe, and therefore they had authority and respect because of who they were part of. But a prophet could come from any tribe and had to prove his divine call and his worth by following what God specifically called them to. That's the call. Following God's specific call and his divine worth. Priests were supported by sacrifices and offerings of the people. While prophets, they didn't know where their food and money was going to come from. They were guaranteed nothing. So this role that Jeremiah was called to, you might think, well, Jeremiah grew up in a family of priests. This is not a big jump for him. It was a huge leap for him. There was a lot of fear involved. There was a lot of unknown involved.

Jesus truly supplies both of these roles in our lives, and we don't have time to unpack all of this, but he is the perfect high priest and the perfect great prophet. Jesus was called to speak truth to people that they often did not want to hear, but that they needed to preserve their future. God's truth. Most people did not accept Jeremiah's message. Most people did not accept in the day Jesus's message. And many people today, if you follow what God has called you to do, may not accept your message either. But that is not the responsibility of one who's been called by God. It's one's responsibility just to be faithful. The first excuse Jeremiah comes up with, let's look, is is this is too hard. God says, Go. I've called you to go. And Jeremiah says in verse 6, Lord God, I don't know how to speak. This is going to be really difficult. I'm used to the priesthood and familiar with that, this prophet deal, whole

different deal.

I'm going to go out there. I don't know what's going to happen. People are going to reject me, most likely. And I might even get in trouble or thrown in prison or killed. I don't know about this, Lord. This is too hard for me. Remember, he's probably in his early 20s when God calls him to do this. The first excuse, this is too hard. The promise comes from God. God may assign you a demanding task. That demanding task is probably right here on this campus because that's where God has you right now. That task might look like, Hey, I don't really want to do that. Somebody else can fill that role. Might look like I might get ridiculed. It might not work. What if it doesn't to fruition? God doesn't charge you with all the results. He only charges you with being faithful. What he's called you to is not too big because he's with you. He says in verse 5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you." I picked you before you were even born. And I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

God is telling him, I know you. And this word know, in ancient language, this word know is more than just, I ran into you or I could put a face with a name. This is a deep, intricate knowledge of who Jeremiah was and how God had uniquely made him. Jeremiah was appointed, he was called, but the promise is that God knew him and would go with him. It's too demanding, it's too hard, is often something we respond with. God responds with, I know you and I'm with you. I know and I'm with you. Second excuse he comes up with, I don't know how to speak. I'm not good at this, God. You're going to tell me to go talk and I don't like to talk. This is familiar, right? Moses had the same excuse. God, I stutter. I can't do that. You're going to tell me to talk to all these people. I'm not a good speaker. That's not really what God's concerned with, because God's not mostly concerned with your talent. He's mostly concerned with your character. And your character is what you take care of, and God will take care of the rest.

Jeremiah says, I don't speak really well. Can't you find somebody else? A great orator, somebody to go? I mean, people listen better, right? That's not what God was concerned with. God was concerned with Jeremiah being faithful and God being the one that's heard. God has a way to overcome weaknesses and insufficiencies, doesn't he? He does it all the time. I've learned over the years, however, the person most aware of his own inadequacy is usually the person most dependent on God's all-sufficiency. It's okay that Jeremiah said, I'm probably not the best guy for this job. That's self-realization, right? I might not be the guy for this job. There's probably people that could do it better. But God says, go. And in our insufficiency, God proves his all-sufficiency. Because we step forward and we follow him. Personally, my inadequacy has had me relying on God in unique ways that I probably never would have if I thought I could do it myself. And these things come up all the time. Things that you look at and you think, I'm not qualified to do that, but God seems to have put it in front of me and called me to do it. I'm going to step out in faith, and God shows up and takes care of it.

2 Corinthians 12 reminds us of this truth. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. So it's not wrong that Jeremiah said, I'm probably not the best speaker out there, as long as he faithfully follows after he acknowledges that. His glory is manifested through our flaws. So the second excuse we see is, I'm not talented enough. I can't do it. There's other people who are better suited. And God's promise comes right behind that and says, God always equips those who he calls. God will take care of the talent factor. You take care of the faithfulness and let the Lord work. This is what God says to Jeremiah, essentially. He says, I don't know how to speak. And then he says, I'm only a youth. I'm too young. We'll get to that in a minute. But this particular excuse of not being talented enough, God's promise comes alongside and says, I'm with you. I will give you what you need. It's not about your talent. It's not about your proficiencies. And I'm not saying don't do things with excellence. Do things as excellently as you can as unto the Lord.

But it's not about you being perfect in order to do what God has called you to do. It's about you relying on him to do what he's called you to do. He says, I'm with you and I'll give you what you need. He'll give you words, he'll give you wisdom, he'll give you discernment, he'll help you make decisions. God will give you the things you need when you step forward to do what he has called you to do.

Third excuse we see here is the time is not right. I hear many people say this, particularly younger

people. The timing is not right. I want to do other things first. There's other things that I was thinking about with my life, but God seems to put this in front of me. I'm going to go do this first, and then I'll come back and do what God's called me to do. The timing is not right. Jeremiah says, I'm too young. I'm not old enough. Nobody's going to listen to me. So the excuse of the timing not being right is not a biblical excuse. God's timing is always right. Jeremiah, being young in his early 20s, his reply reveals a lot about his age, but also a lot about his immaturity. But God can work with that if you're faithful.

We look at situations like what happened this week. I listened to a lot of Charlie Kirk, and I'd known about him and watched a lot of things. I didn't actually know he was only 31. Because the way that God was using him was beyond his age. Because age is not a factor in your faithfulness. Jeremiah had it as an excuse. God had a promise to offset it. Jeremiah said, The time isn't right. And God said, My timing is always right. You just be faithful and let me take care of it.

The last excuse we're going to look at in verse 17 through 19, look over there with me. Jeremiah came to a place where he wasn't sure that it was time to do it right then. So do I have to go now is the last question. And this is something I want to present to you. This is probably the most poignant one for being on today's campus in this wonderful university that seeks to honor the Lord with all that they do, both with you and through you. This one, do I have to do it now or can't I wait till I graduate? I'm focused on my studies right now, but you want me to invest in someone else? You want me to be active in a local church, too? You want me to be a light on campus? You want me to be involved with others? But I'm here for school. I'll wait and do that when I'm done. That excuse doesn't stand up when God has God told you to do something.

God was expecting immediate action from Jeremiah. And while Jeremiah is given a few excuses, and notice the patience of the Lord, right? He could have said back in verse 4, Knock it off and start moving. But that's not what God does. He's patient. He just promises to offset the excuses and the fears. And then he gets to this one, is it now? And God expects immediate response. The verse says in verse 17, Dress yourself with work. Arise and say to them everything that I command you. Do this now. Change your outfit. Get ready. Let's go. You don't wear your best clothing when you're going to get dirty doing something. God says here in ancient times, there's this phrase that you'll know throughout scripture, Gird up your loins. The guys were wearing dresses or skirts, you have longer robes, and you had to pull them up and wrap them up or you couldn't run. You were slow. God says, You better get ready. Let's go. We're moving. Change your outfit, change your mindset. Let's go. Get ready for action. Dress yourself with work and get up. The God said, might be that Jeremiah was actually sitting while he was giving excuses. God says, Get ready, stand up. We're moving. Now is the time if God has called you to do it. Today's day and age, we use all kinds of phrases like this when we really want to get to work when we're ready, right? Let's get to the hustle. Let's grind. Put the work in. You got to do this. This is what God is talking about here. If it was in today's language, the idea of girding up your loins and arising and be ready for action would have been what he was saying to Let's go. We're getting to work here. God's promise in light of Jeremiah's last excuse here is this, If I have called you, I will fulfill my purpose in you. If I have called you, I will equip you, God says.

If I have called you, I will enable you. God says, If I have called you, I will protect you, and I will, and this is the most important one, I will accompany you. I will go with you. All of these things wrapped up in God telling Jeremiah no more excuses. I hear them, and they're probably true statements, but God is bigger and more sufficient and a protector, and he will help you do what he's called you to do.

So as we look today at what excuses and promises we see just in this little section out of Jeremiah, the question arises for every one of I know you're students, and there's some faculty here, and I'm older, but the question comes to each of us the same way. God has called you. Will you respond? Or will you sit back and have excuses? God's not afraid if you bring in your excuses as long as you bring them to him, and as long as you're open to his promises, because his promises are bigger than what might be holding you back. We measure so many things in this world: popularity, success, financial well-being. We measure all kinds of different measurements in God's world that we live in.

But God measures one thing. He measures faithfulness. If he has called you to do it, be faithful. And What he has called you to do on this campus in this time is to be faithful, Christ-centered student

disciples and to do what he's called you to do. Listen to him well, respond to him when he calls. If the world has shown us anything else recently, it's that we are at a great shortage of people who respond to God's call in a Christ-centered, rational, peaceful way. We're at a shortage of that. So be that. Be bold and courageous and do not shy away from what God has shown you and taught you, what he has made you to be and what he has called you to do. Don't shy away from that at all. And don't let anyone deter you from going forward. Instead, know that your shortcomings are filled with his glory. Let him work in and through you right now, not next year, not when you graduate, not later in life after you have some fun, right now. Let God work through you to accomplish his purpose. So my encouragement to you today is this.

Know that you have been called by God, just like Jeremiah. Know that you have been called to represent him in your everyday life and in every relationship you're in. And all this diverse world with complicated situations and grief and things that come towards us that we have no idea how to handle and deal with. We are insufficient. He is sufficient. Rely on him. Don't give excuses. Remember his promises and go in his power and his protection.

And finally, in light of the events of our last few days, don't allow your confusion or your grief to lead you in two different directions that are not helpful. Don't allow your confusion or grief to lead you to inaction and be paralyzed by the fear that comes with confusion and grief. Don't let it lead you to inaction, and don't let it lead you to improper action. Anger and things that do not fall in line with the gifts of the Spirit. Instead, respond the way God has called you to in the day he's called you to do. It'll change your life. It'll change the lives of those around you. It will continue to change this campus, and it'll change the world as God wants to use you in all that he's called you to do.

Will you pray with me? Father, thank you for a few moments where we get to look into your word, Lord. I pray that even as we go from here, anything that I have said that's unhelpful or distracting would fade away, but your word would go deep into the hearts of those that hear it. Lord, I pray over each student in this room. You have a unique call on their life. You have known them before they were formed in their mother's womb, and you have called them to do lots of diverse and unique things in your kingdom. Help them to do it well. Fill them with your spirit to do it faithfully. Allow the excuses to be met by all of your promises and continue to work and change our world, Lord. While it is broken, we are called to be salt and light. Help us to do that well. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.