**Jeremiah 1:4-10** **A Twinkle in the Father’s eye**

A question someone asked me just this week was this: “Do you think God has a plan for our lives?” You know, as in a blueprint – job, home, partner, travels, that sort of thing. How would you have answered that question?

I think back to the debates I used to have with my Dad when I was a young Christian. One of the arguments he’d like to throw at me was how insignificant we humans were. He’d go on about the incomprehensible size of the universe, and how incredibly microscopic our galaxy was within it, never mind our puny planet within that galaxy. He’d say that the concept of a divine entity ever being aware of the individuals on our microscopic speck in the universe was absolutely ludicrous.

My response was that if a divine entity was powerful enough to create and control this universe which is beyond our comprehension, that this same incomprehensible power would mean God had the capacity to be aware of his creation. He’s not finite and limited like we are. We had some fiery arguments.

I’d like us to explore this concept a little this morning. Does God know we exist? If so, how far does this knowledge go? Is it just a general awareness, or is his knowledge of his created beings so intimate that he has an individual plan for each of our lives? And if this is the case, how should we respond?

Let’s look at our Old Testament reading, and in particular verses 4 & 5 –Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "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."

This passage introduces us to Jeremiah, whom God called to a role of national and, ultimately, international importance. As we look at these verses, we’ll find that God says four things to the prophet that completely change our view of what it means to be human. And if we take them on board, they will also completely change the way we relate to God.

1. First of all, God says to Jeremiah, *"I formed you."* Our secular world sees conception as only a biological event. Yet here we are confronted with a completely different view of the origins of human life.

If we look at psalm 139, the psalmist cries out, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the lowst parts of the earth. " (Psa\_139:14-15).

According to the Scriptures, God is not only aware that we exist - he actually formed us in our mothers’ womb.

Now, at this point, there may be an uncomfortable question emerging for some of us. You might remember the story of the conjoined twins we had a few weeks ago. You may also remember in the video one of the twins answered a list of commonly asked questions, one of which was, “why are you like this?” - and the girl answered, “God made us this way.”

Hanicapped children. That’s a difficult one, isn’t it? We’re praying for little Gemma at the moment – severely disabled from birth, and now on her way back to God. Our first child Bethany was born with a disability, which meant she struggled with life, and she lost the fight when she was 21. If God forms us in our mother’s womb, does God do this on purpose? When a child is born with a disability, does he deliberately create them that way?

**No!** This is where the little girl in our story of a few weeks ago didn’t quite have things quite right. God did not deliberately plan for the twins to be that way. Let me assure you that God does not create a disability. God creates a person. The disabilities and deformities that sometimes emerge at birth are a result of a world gone wrong – a world that chose, at the beginning of humanity, to go it alone, without God, causing sin and sickness to enter the world.

Some disabilities are a result of a genetic abnormality; some are a result of other things - radiation, or addiction or malnutrition or illness, or violence. None of these are created by God. These things are the tragic fallout of a race that has chosen to ignore God.

God forms a *person*,and every person, no matter how that person is born, is precious in God’s sight. That means every single one of us, regardless of how highly, or how poorly we regard ourselves, is precious to God.

So the first thing this passage tells us about being human is that God *formed* us – that is, he formed us as *people –* people that he could love and relate to.

2. "*I knew you"* (Jer\_1:5).

Going back to verse 5 again, God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I *knew* you. This time, God tells Jeremiah that he *knew* him, and knew him *before* he formed him! So not only does God know we exist, he planned our existence, and knew us intimately, *before* we were ever conceived. Isn’t that a mind-blowing thought? We were the original twinkle in the Father’s eye!

That means that there are no ‘accidents’ when it comes to children being born. Perhaps a child may not be planned by its parents, but that child is definitely planned by God. Every child conceived in its mother’s womb has been lovingly planned and known by its creator.

Psalm 139 tells us how well God knows us: “O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

And then in v16 of the same psalm, we read: “Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.”

God not only knew us before we were conceived, the psalmist tells us that all of our days were also formed, before none of them existed. So God very definitely has a plan for our lives! Our days – and months and years – are *formed* by God. That means that they are given shape and substance and direction. Our lives are not random.

This knowledge deeply significant in the abortion debate, isn’t it? As Christians, if we believe that every child is conceived in the mind of God before it is ever conceived physically, and that God has lovingly numbered and planned that child’s days, is abortion ever acceptable? (That’s a debate for another time perhaps.)

If we have any doubt that God has a plan for our lives, then we need to absorb the next part of this passage:

3. "*I consecrated you"* (Jer\_1:5). "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;

Consecrated, or sanctified, as this verse is sometimes translated, means to be set apart for a specific purpose. Not only was Jeremiah known by God, before conception, not only was he formed by God in his mother’s womb, Jeremiah was then set apart for God. God chose him to serve him and to serve him in a particular way – and all this before Jeremiah ever uttered his first cry!

God ordained that Jeremiah should be a prophet – that he should carry God’s message to the nation of Israel:

4. "*I ordained you a prophet to the nations"* (Jer\_1:5). For Jeremiah, the form his life was to take on earth was wrapped up in the purposes and foreknowledge of God. And it’s the same for each one of us. We are all part of God’s plan. We each have a part to play. We are all significant. One of the greatest joys we can know as Christians is to receive our marching orders, whatever they might be.

As we meet this morning, Anita Harris will be finding her feet in Uganda. She was chosen by a large and very well-known church in the USA (Bethel Church) to be part of an international mission team to Uganda. The thing that has marked Anita’s preparation for this trip has been her excitement and anticipation of what God will do in her and through her on this mission. And believe me, God will do some

amazing things through that girl!

Now we won’t all be called to be prophets like Jeremiah (for which I am thankful – his was a tough call), or short missionaries to Uganda – but we will all be called into God’s service. Our task as God’s children is to discern his plan for our lives and to respond in obedience. It’s then that we will experience to the full the abundant life Jesus promised in John 10:10. “I have come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness.”

How do we do that? It’s the same process I mentioned a couple of weeks ago when we were talking about the gifts of the Spirit. Remember the three steps?

1. Be prayerful – say, “God, please show me your plan for my life.”
2. Be alert – to your own interests and passions, to your life experience and your areas of expertise. God works *with* who we are, not against who we are. Our interests & skills were ordained before our conception and will often show us areas in which God can use us
3. Be courageous – be willing to step into uncharted territory. As he did for Jeremiah, God will always equip us to do what he asks us to do.

This morning, may we recognise how precious we are to God, know that he has a plan for our lives, and be willing to step up and receive our marching orders.

Let’s pray.

z