

February 17, 2019

Jeremiah 17:5-8: ***“I Am Trusting You, Lord Jesus!”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A pastor in the Philippines described a wagon driver who was on his way to market and there beside the road he saw an old man carrying a heavy load on his back - apparently a burden that he had been carrying for a very long time. So, the driver pulled beside the old man and took pity on him, and told him that he was welcome to ride on the back of his wagon to get relief from that heavy load that was bearing down on him. Well, the old man readily accepted this invitation, and onto the wagon he jumped. As time went on, the driver turned around to check on the old man, and he was flabbergasted at what he saw. Sure enough, the old man was sitting on the wagon, but he was still carrying the heavy load. He never bothered to take it off his back, even after ascending onto the very wagon that gave him an opportunity to set the burden aside.

There appears to be many Christians like that. Jesus is like the wagon driver who takes pity on the old man carrying the heavy load on his back. We are the ones carrying the heavy load. He takes pity on us and kindly says, "Hop on my wagon to find relief from the load you carry. Throw it on me and you will find rest." "What a wonderful wagon driver!" we think to ourselves. And we hop on, but we still keep the load on our backs, as if it is still ours to endlessly carry. We know Jesus as the Savior who says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28)," and we still insist upon taking care of the load ourselves, rather than trusting in him to take care of it all. It's as if we simply will not trust in him to rescue us from the load. "Instead, there must be another way," we think, "and that way resides with us or even others." It goes against our sinful nature to say "**I am Trusting You, Lord Jesus!**"

When you read the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah, it feels a lot like you are reading one of the Psalms or a section from Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. There are two contrasting phrases in Jeremiah that essentially capture the point: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man . . . Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." The issue in our Old Testament lesson is about where we place our trust.

You will recall that the very first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods." *Luther's Small Catechism* explains, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." With that in mind, what then does it mean to trust in God above all things? Well, we trust in God above all things when we commit our lives completely to his keeping, rely on him for help in every need, and are certain that he is always good to us and will keep every one of his promises. On the other hand, we cease to trust in God when, as *Luther's Large Catechism* states, "our hearts pursue other things and seeks help and consolation from creature, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe that whatever good it receives comes from God."

Jeremiah tells us that a heart that turns from the Lord "is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land." The load that we carry on our backs is a life without God. You name the trouble, and it is directly related to the fact that we have turned away from God and have turned toward ourselves. When you leave behind the good one and all the good that is from him, what is there but absolute aloneness - darkness? The only reason we do not experience this to the fullest extent is that God is still good and ever good toward us in

this life down here. He allows things to go on running. In the midst of all of this, he even sends his goodness in his one and only Son to rescue us from every load there is. He sends his Son to live a righteous life for us and suffer and die for our unrighteousness that we might be declared righteous in his sight and welcomed into the forever kingdom where all are made righteous and live in righteousness.

Luther's Large Catechism sets us straight:

We are to trust God alone and turn to him, expecting from him only good things; for it is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health protection, peace, and all temporal and eternal blessings. It is he who protects us from evil, he who saves and delivers us when any evil befalls. It is God alone, I have often enough repeated, from whom we receive all that is good and by whom we are delivered from all evil . . . he is an eternal fountain which overflows with sheer goodness and pours fourth all that is good in name and in fact.

For those of us who have been touched by Jesus, there is a terrible tension. Christ has made us a new people by placing us on his wagon to relieve sin, death, and the devil. But still, we have the sinful flesh that simply does not want to drop the load and leave it all behind, because it confuses God's ongoing goodness down here, seeing it as almost a promise that sin is okay and there will be no judgment. We are constantly enticed not to trust in God above all things. We are enticed to hold onto the load. I know, this makes no sense that anyone would want to hold onto the load of sin, death, and the devil, but the sinful flesh sees it all with a blindness that staggers the mind. From the vantage point of the sinful flesh, everything is going to be okay. That's delusion.

While this age is slowly slipping into an absolute aloneness called death and hell, the goodness that God has left in this world is easily misinterpreted as a "green light" from God to get and grab everything without consideration of good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, heaven and hell. It is so deep of a problem that the sinful flesh uses the goodness of God to deceive us into an attitude of self-absorption that does nothing but pursue what has been made. I mean the whole unbelieving world is built on the god of self and making a heaven on earth. The whole unbelieving world strives for a down here that never ends. The whole unbelieving world believes that it's all party with no consequences. But again, Jeremiah says that heart the turns from the Lord "is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land."

The prophet also says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." God has blessed us to trust. He has created such a wonderful thing at the cross. It is there that we see the heart of God and how much he truly loves us. God so loved us that he gave his one and only Son. It is at the cross where we are turned inside out, emptied of ourselves, reconnected to God, and forgiven for all of our sins. In the face of every moment where we might stumble back into a lack of trust in God, it is at the cross that we turn our focus to see that we have every reason to trust in him above all things, for it is at the cross that all is given in order that we might have all things. It is therefore vital to the survival of our trust in God to constantly remain rooted in everything accomplished at the cross of Jesus. It creates a trust that will last. In our Old Testament lesson, the prophet Jeremiah talks about this in powerful language.

Trees planted by rivers do well. Their soil is fertile; their roots are well supplied with water; and they bear much fruit. Such a tree does not have to 'worry' when the heat arises or the drought comes. It is secure because it has a water source that is independent from the weather. Such is the picture; and so it is with the blessed man. He is graciously planted into a relationship with the Almighty. And whether he endures seasons of much or little, rain or drought, peace or calamity, the fountain of living water continually nourishes him. He will not wither nor will he be fearful; he will be spiritually prosperous and fruitful.

Trust in God is perfect when life and death, glory and shame, adversity and prosperity, become all the same to us. But this attitude is not achieved by merely thinking about such things. It is learned in the school of temptation and prayer. This is part of what the apostle Paul is saying to us when he writes about the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding," going on to say that it is this peace that "will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7)." Those words take us to the cross where our enmity with God is over. It is no wonder then that in the context of this peace, the Christian is given a trust in God that is able to push back the temptation to trust in anyone and anything other than God. Paul goes on to put it in this way: "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13)."

"I am Trusting You, Lord Jesus!" serves as the theme for our message. Most all of you probably know it is the first line of a hymn. The truth is that one is blessed who is rooted in the cross of Jesus. The cross gives us every reason in to trust in the Lord Jesus . . . for pardon, cleansing, guidance in all things, power to overcome, and the strength to not fall. He bids us to sit on the wagon and let go of the load. He wants you to give it all to him and trust that he knows what is best, for when it is all said and done, he has only one thing in mind for you - for us - that we make it home to be with him forever!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott