

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Dear Friends in Christ,

Please listen to these words from the fifth chapter of Ecclesiastes:

As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This is a grievous evil; just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness (unsure of what's to come), in much vexation (trouble) and sickness and anger. (vv.15-17)

What gain is there? If we're honest, none. All I've ever seen in a casket is the body of a beloved child of God. We remember the rich man, as Jesus tells us, "who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously every day," then "died and was buried" and found himself in unending torment in Hades. "...he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'" (Lk. 16:19-31) So much for his purple and fine linen clothing! So much for his sumptuous feasting! Oh, for a taste of water from the tip of a poor man's finger! Isn't it amazing how the flesh's cravings smother the reality of this world's journey to dust and eternal...? Let's consider . . .

THE REALITY . . .

I. The Curse.

Our text begins:

Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He 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. (vv.5,6)

God is here addressing His people's inclination to trust in human wisdom to solve all their problems. Well, isn't that the way it often works? People look to human wisdom to solve all their problems and to make sure the flesh gets what it craves.

I ask you to listen to this definition of the word *civilization*: Civilization is "the process by which a society or place reaches an advanced stage of social and cultural development and organization." By the way, "advanced" has been defined as "state-of-the-art" or "new".

Do you think we've arrived? How about, on the way and close? Just where has human thinking, apart from seeking God, brought us? Malcolm Muggeridge was a noted English journalist, satirist and socialist. He was attracted to communism and lived in the Soviet Union for a while, then turned anticommunist, and was ultimately converted to Christianity. Muggeridge wrote: "When men turn away from God...they must either imagine they are gods themselves or...revert to being animals and seek their own carnality. Megalomania or erotomania...Hitler or Hugh Hefner." I know that will only resonate with older generations. It would be good to help the younger understand.

So, God says through Jeremiah, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord." What do you see as you observe where this world now stands? The Living God is mostly seen as an uninterested bystander, or whatever a person imagines his god to be, as long as his god is in agreement with the person's thinking, or that there simply is no god.

Of the human condition apart from God, God also says, "He 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." (v.6) That is, he has no way of subsisting. He dwells in dying and death. As Solomon wrote,

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” (Eccl. 1:2,9)

II. The Blessing.

And that brings us to The Blessing. God says, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.” (v.7) And I’m thinking that most of you are quite familiar with these words from the Proverbs: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” (Prov. 3:5,6) And trust is defined as “firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of something or someone.” Obviously, for us that someone is Almighty God. He will make our journey to eternal life straight and secure, no matter how bizarre or troubling life becomes.

To “trust in the Lord”, to “acknowledge him”, draws us to God’s love in Christ which calls poor, miserable sinners such as us to repentance and trust in Christ for forgiveness and eternal life. Psalm 1 reminds us: “for the Lord knows the way of the righteous.” (v.6) He knows who we are, our walk with Him, and directs our steps through this world to everlasting life. The question is, “What does ‘the way of the righteous’ mean?” The answer is this word of God:

...the righteousness of God (the perfect obedience God demands) has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified (pronounced “not guilty”) by his grace (His love for the unlovable) as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (the price Jesus paid for our forgiveness and eternal life)... (Rom. 3:21-24)

Perhaps you’ve heard the following before. If so, it’s worth a re-hear:

Let a man go to a psychiatrist and what does he become? An adjusted sinner. Let a man go to a physician and what does he become? A healthy sinner. Let a man achieve wealth and what does he become? A wealthy sinner. Let a man join a church, sign a card, and turn over a new leaf and what does he become? A religious sinner. But let him go in sincere repentance and faith to the foot of Calvary’s cross, and what does he become? A new creature in Jesus Christ, forgiven, reconciled, with meaning and purpose in his life and on the way to marvelous fulfillment in God’s will. (Albert M Well’s, Jr., Inspiring Quotations, Thomas Nelson, Publishers, Nashville, 1988, p.174)

III. Another Blessing. v.8

Again, our text for this morning is from the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah. Most of you know that Jeremiah lived during the absolute horror of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. The Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was the result of God’s wrath because of its gross idolatry and the want to be to satisfy its fleshy cravings. In the sixteenth chapter of Jeremiah, God set forth the consequences of His people’s apostasy:

“For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who fathered them in this land: They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth.” (Jer. 16:3-4)

In spite of this, God set forth the alternative, one that would set before His people great blessings. verse 8 of our text:

“He (the one who is blessed by trusting in the Lord) is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when the heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

What God said echoes these words from Psalm 1: “He (the one who trusts in the Lord) is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers.” (v.3) This does not mean to be worldly rich and in tune with this world’s thinking and ways that would openly defy the Lord. This refers to spiritually prospering in the Lord. For us, it’s knowing that we have an eternal kingdom, trusting that He will see us through this world and sustain us as He did His remnant of the Old Testament, as He did for such as Abraham, Moses, Daniel and his three friends; as He did for the Apostles, Luther, the martyrs and all His church down to the present and into the days to come.

The greatest reality is this: who we are and what we have in Christ do not end at the moment of death, but lift us to eternal, unchangeable life and joy. The reality is always the same: Jesus and His love for us. Thank God!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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- II. The Blessing.
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