

JEREMIAH 17:5-10 ⁵ Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. ⁶ They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness in an uninhabited salt land. ⁷ Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. ⁸ They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. ⁹ The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? ¹⁰ I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

LUKE 6:17-26 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. ²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when people hate you when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. ²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

BIRDS ARE AMAZING CREATURES, MANY OF THEM PRODUCE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC, AND THEY CAN BE A DELIGHT TO LISTEN TO AND TO WATCH.

FURTHERMORE, NO ONE CAN RIGHTFULLY ACCUSE BIRDS OF BEING LAZY SINCE THEY SPEND MUCH THEIR DAY FINDING FOOD, FOR THEMSELVES, THEIR MATE SITTING ON A NEST, AND FOR HATCHLINGS.

ANOTHER PREACHER TOLD A STORY ABOUT HER GRANDFATHER’S LOVE FOR THE WILD BIRDS, WHICH HE FED WITH A SUET HE MADE HIMSELF.

NATURALLY, WHENEVER HE WENT OUTSIDE TO REPLENISH THE SUET THE BIRDS LOVED SO MUCH, THEY FLEW AWAY.

BUT THEN THE TIME CAME WHEN THEY DID NOT SCATTER AS MUCH, SINCE THEY RECOGNIZED THE MAN WAS THE SOURCE FOR THE FOOD THEY LOVED.

THE TIME EVEN CAME WHEN MANY BIRDS FLEW JOYFULLY AROUND HIM WHEN HE CAME OUT TO FEED THEM AGAIN.

THEY REJOICED IN THE ONE WHO PROVIDED FOR THEM, AND THEY WERE NO LONGER AFRAID OF HIM.

PEOPLE, UNLIKE THOSE BIRDS HAVE MORE DIFFICULTLY RECOGNIZING GOD AS THE SOURCE OF THEIR BLESSINGS.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF THOSE WHO DO, OR HAVE IN THEIR YOUTH, WORKED HARD FOR A LIVING.

WE OFTEN THINK WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED OUR ACHIEVEMENTS ON OUR OWN, OR AT THE MOST WITH A MINIMAL AMOUNT OF HELP.

THEREFORE, PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGE, OR THANK THE LORD, LET ALONE DEPEND UPON GOD.

BOTH JEREMIAH AND JESUS DELIVERED GOD’S MESSAGE CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO TRUST IN HIM MORE THAN IN THEMSELVES OR OTHERS.

IN JEREMIAH'S TIME THE PROBLEM WAS THAT MOST OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND THEIR LEADERS TURNED AWAY FROM THE LORD.

IN PARTICULAR, THEY LOOKED FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN POLITICAL AND MILITARY ALLIANCES RATHER THAN IN GOD'S PROMISE OF PROTECTION.

THE MESSAGE THE PROPHET DELIVERED IN TODAY'S READING WAS A WARNING TO THOSE WHO FAILED TO SEEK THE LORD, AND TRUST IN HIM.

SUCH PEOPLE'S HEARTS, MEANING THEIR WILLS AND INTENTIONS, WERE DIRECTED AWAY FROM THE LORD.

CONSEQUENTLY, RATHER THAN SEEKING THE LORD, THEY LOOKED TO IDOLS, OR TO HUMAN RESOURCES FOR PROVISION AND HELP.

JEREMIAH SAID THAT THOSE WHO TRUSTED IN, THAT IS-WERE COMMITTED TO GOD, WERE LIKE TREES WITH STRONG ROOTS THAT KEPT THEM NOURISHED AND SUSTAINED THEM IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

CONVERSELY THE PROPHET COMPARED THOSE WHO TURNED AWAY FROM GOD TO DESERT SHRUBS.

THE REV. MARILYN MURPHEE OFFERS DIFFERENT METAPHOR FOR THOSE WHO TURN FROM THE LORD.

SHE SAYS THEY CAN BE COMPARED TO THE TUMBLEWEEDS OF THE AMERICAN WEST.

TUMBLEWEEDS SOMETIMES ARE SEEN IN A POSITIVE LIGHT IN THAT THEY CAN REPRESENT A FREE LIFESTYLE OF THOSE WHO ARE NEITHER FENCED IN, NOR TIED DOWN.

BUT ANOTHER VIEW OF TUMBLEWEEDS CAN BE FOUND IN PICTURE OF THEM ROLLING THROUGH THE GHOST TOWNS OF THE OLD WEST.

THERE, THEY CONVEY A SENSE OF LONELINESS, LOSS OF HOPE, AND ABANDONMENT.

REV. MURPHEE EXPLAINS THAT A TUMBLEWEED BEGINS AS A ROOTED PLANT, BUT THEN IT BREAKS AWAY FROM ITS ROOTS AND IS DRIVEN BY THE WIND.

THE TUMBLEWEED HAS NO CONTROL WHERE IT WILL GO OR WHEN IT WILL STOP, AND IT IS MOSTLY AN UNPRODUCTIVE AND USELESS PLANT.

PEOPLE WHO BREAK AWAY FROM THEIR CONNECTION TO GOD ARE MUCH LIKE TUMBLEWEEDS.

THEY MAY THINK THEY ARE FREE, BUT THEY HAVE NO REAL CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES.

CONSEQUENTLY, THEY CAN MISS OUT ON OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS THE VALUE OF CONNECTION TO GOD AND TO OTHER PEOPLE.

JEREMIAH DECLARED THAT PEOPLE WHO HAVE TURNED FROM THE LORD, EVEN IF THEY FIND ALTERNATIVE RESOURCES, ARE CURSED.

BUT THOSE WHO STAY CONNECTED TO GOD ARE BLESSED THROUGH THAT CONNECTION TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE.

GOD HAD SHOWN JEREMIAH THE DISMAL FUTURE OF THE NATION IF THE PEOPLE AND THEIR LEADERS CONTINUED TO SEEK SALVATION OUTSIDE OF GOD.

HIS PURPOSE WAS TO CONVINCED THEM THEIR WELL-BEING WAS ROOTED IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LORD.

THEREFORE, HE CALLED THEM TO TURN BACK TO GOD, BOTH AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A NATION.

THE MESSAGE JESUS DELIVERED WAS UNDER DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, AND YET IT WAS VERY MUCH THE SAME ONE THE PROPHET HAD SPOKEN CENTURIES EARLIER.

JESUS DIRECTED PEOPLE TO REPENT, TRUST GOD, AND TO LOVE THE LORD THEIR GOD, AND TO LOVE OTHERS LIKE THEY LOVE THEMSELVES.

WHAT IS NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT, HOWEVER, IS THE TONE OF JESUS' MESSAGE.

INSTEAD OF PROCLAIMING THOSE WHO UPROOT THEMSELVES FROM GOD ARE CURSED, HE EXPRESSED WOE OVER THEM.

WOE IS A TERM OF PITY AND SADNESS, THUS SHOWING JESUS' PROFOUND LOVE, EVEN FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT ADMIT THEY ARE SINNERS, OR THINK THEY DO NOT NEED GOD,

THE BLESSINGS AND WOES THAT COMPOSE LUKE'S VERSION OF THE BEATITUDES WERE SPOKEN AS A WAY TO GET PEOPLE'S ATTENTION AND TO DIRECT THEM BACK TO GOD.

THE SAVIOR'S WORDS, HOWEVER CONVEY A MORE SUBTLE MESSAGE THAN JEREMIAH DELIVERED.

WE CAN BETTER UNDERSTAND THE SAVIOR'S INTENTIONS IF WE GIVE HIS WORDS MORE ATTENTION THAN A SUPERFICIAL NOTICE.

FIRST, JESUS IS NOT SAYING THAT THOSE WHO ARE POOR ARE AUTOMATICALLY SAVED BY THEIR POVERTY.

NOR IS HE SUGGESTING THAT THERE IS ANYTHING WRONG WITH HAVING SOMETHING BEYOND YOUR DAILY NEEDS.

THERE IS, IN FACT NO REAL VIRTUE OR BLESSING IN STARVING OR BEING PERPETUALLY HUNGRY OR THIRSTY.

NEITHER DOES CHRIST'S STATEMENT THAT THOSE WHO LAUGH NOW WILL WEEP LATER MEAN THAT CHRISTIANS MUST ALWAYS BE SOMBER PEOPLE

LACKING A SENSE OF HUMOR OR BEING GRIM AND CHEERLESS WILL NO MORE SAVE YOU, THAN BEING A JOLLY OR HAPPY PERSON WILL CONDEMN YOU.

LET US NEVER FORGET OR DOUBT THAT SALVATION IS THROUGH GOD'S GRACE BY FAITH IN CHRIST, BECAUSE HE DIED TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS.

WHAT THEN DID JESUS MEAN BY SAYING THE POOR OR HUNGRY, AND THOSE WHO WEEP OR ARE HATED ARE BLESSED?

AND CONVERSELY, WHY DOES HE PITY TO THOSE WHO ARE RICH, FILLED WITH GOOD THINGS, OR ENJOY LIFE TO THE FULLEST, AND ARE POPULAR?

IT HAS TO DO WITH LOOKING TO GOD IN HOPE IF YOU ARE IN NEED, AND LOOKING TO GOD IN GRATITUDE IF YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED.

THE LATER, GROUP IN PARTICULAR, IS ALSO CALLED TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD BY SHARING WITH OTHERS.

THOSE CONTRASTING DESCRIPTIONS OF LIFE WERE ALSO INTENDED TO OVERTURN THE CONSENSUS OF THE TIME.

THE COMMON VIEW WAS THAT THOSE WHO ARE POOR OR SUFFERING ARE BEING PUNISHED BY GOD, AND PEOPLE WHO ARE RICH AND HAPPY ARE BEING REWARDED.

JESUS REVERSED THOSE COMMON ASSUMPTIONS IN ORDER TO GET PEOPLE TO RECOGNIZE THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM TO BE.

ON ONE LEVEL- HIS MESSAGE POINTED TO THE FUTURE TIME WHEN HIS FOLLOWERS WOULD BE PERSECUTED AND IMPOVERISHED BECAUSE THEY WERE CHRISTIAN.

HE WAS ENCOURAGING PRESENT AND FUTURE DISCIPLES TO STAY FAITHFUL EVEN WHEN WORLDLY CIRCUMSTANCES WERE NOT FAVORABLE.

JESUS' WORDS WERE MEANT TO ASSURE HIS FOLLOWERS THAT BEING PERSECUTED OR SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH IN HIM ARE NOT SIGNS OF GOD'S DISPLEASURE, BUT OF THE WORLD'S DISPLEASURE.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO CHRIST'S SERMON ON THE PLAIN, AS TODAY'S GOSPEL READING IS OFTEN CALLED.

JESUS WAS ALSO SPEAKING TO THE FACT THAT THOSE IN GREAT NEED OF FOOD OR COMFORT OR COMPANIONSHIP ARE MORE LIKELY TO TURN TO GOD.

WHILE THOSE WHO HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO LIVE ON AND ARE HAPPY AND POPULAR OFTEN SEEK SATISFACTION AND SUSTENANCE IN SOURCES OTHER THAN THE LORD.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE JESUS DELIVERED WAS SIMILAR TO JEREMIAH'S IN THE SENSE IT ASKS US TO LOOK AT WHERE WE FIND OUR SECURITY.

JESUS WAS TEACHING OUR FUTURE IN THE KINGDOM AND FAMILY OF GOD IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON WHO OR WHAT WE ARE IN THE WORLD, BUT ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

THUS, THE UNASKED QUESTIONS BEHIND THE SAVIOR'S BLESSINGS AND WOES ARE ONES LIKE THE FOLLOWING:

DO WE SEEK TO BE ROOTED IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD, OR DO PUT OUR TRUST IN RICHES?

DO WE SEEK WORLDLY PLEASURE MORE THAN SPIRITUAL JOY?

AND ARE WE SO CONCERNED WITH WHAT OTHERS THINK ABOUT US THAT WE DO NOT EVEN LOOK TO GOD, OR CARE WHAT GOD'S OPINION MAY BE?

IN TRUTH, MOST CHRISTIANS NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE FINANCIALLY OR SOCIALLY FIT INTO BOTH CATEGORIES OF BLESSINGS AND WOES.

WE ARE NEITHER ALWAYS OR FULLY PERFECT, NOR ARE WE PERPETUALLY OR COMPLETELY DEPRAVED.

THIS IS WHY THE WARNINGS OF JEREMIAH AND THOSE OF JESUS CAN BE HELPFUL FOR US TO HEAR AND CONSIDER FROM TIME TO TIME.

AND SO, TODAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS CHALLENGE US TO REFLECT ON OUR LIVES, AND WHERE WE PUT OUR GREATEST TRUST.

IF WE SEEK SECURITY IN WORLDLY RESOURCES, WE WILL BECOME LIKE TUMBLEWEEDS DETACHED FROM THE LORD AND BLOWN AROUND IN LIFE- NEVER FULFILLING OUR PURPOSE.

WHEN WE SEEK SECURITY IN GOD AND COMMIT OURSELVES TO JESUS WHO IS COMMITED TO US, WE ARE ROOTED IN HIS LOVE AND LIFE, BOTH NOW AND FOR ETERNITY.

BOTH OF TODAY'S READINGS BRING TO MIND THE WORDS OF DEUTERONOMY 30:19-20, WHICH RECORDS GOD'S COMMAND TO HIS PEOPLE TO MAKE A CHOICE.

"I CALL HEAVEN AND EARTH TO WITNESS AGAINST YOU TODAY THAT I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU LIFE AND DEATH, BLESSINGS AND CURSES.

CHOOSE LIFE SO THAT YOU AND YOUR DESCENDANTS MAY LIVE, LOVING THE LORD YOUR GOD, OBEYING HIM, HOLDING FAST TO HIM, FOR THAT MEANS LIFE TO YOU...."

AND, I SAW A SAYING ON FACEBOOK THIS WEEK BY A CHRISTIAN AUTHOR NAMED PETER SCAZZERO, WHICH WAS INSPIRED BY THE REMINDER THAT NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

MR. SCAZZERO WROTE THIS REMINDER THAT THE TRUE SOURCE OF HOPE IS FOUND IN CHRIST, NOT IN US.

"OUR CONFIDENCE IS NOT IN OUR LOVE FOR JESUS WHICH IS FRAGILE, FICKLE AND LIMITED BUT IN HIS LOVE FOR US WHICH IS UNBREAKABLE, FAITHFUL AND WITHOUT CONDITIONS."

THIS IS A GOOD DESCRIPTION OF THOSE WHO ARE BLESSED- NOT BECAUSE OF WHO THEY ARE OR HOW WELL THEY ARE DOING, BUT BECAUSE THEY KNOW JESUS LOVES THEM, NO MATTER WHAT.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THE WONDERFUL GIFTS OF HIS GRACE AND LOVE FOUND IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JEREMIAH 17:5-10 & LUKE 6:17-26

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A CHRISTIAN AUTHOR WROTE WORDS OF WISDOM ABOUT OUR SOURCE OF LIFE AND HOPE: "OUR CONFIDENCE IS NOT IN OUR LOVE FOR JESUS WHICH IS FRAGILE, FICKLE AND LIMITED BUT IN HIS LOVE FOR US WHICH IS UNBREAKABLE, FAITHFUL AND WITHOUT CONDITIONS." AMEN