

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 13, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

## Commentary on Jeremiah 17:5-10

This message of curses and blessings takes place within a difficult time for Jeremiah. Jeremiah has faithfully proclaimed God's judgment upon the people only to have them plot against him. In Jeremiah 11:19, Jeremiah is described as a tree with bitter fruit (message of judgment). They plot saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!" In response, Jeremiah asks God, "Why does the way of the guilty prosper?" for they are plotting against him. Jeremiah reminds God that, "You see me and test me-- my heart is with you". Despite this, when a drought hits the people, Jeremiah pleads for the people in Chapter 14 only to have God remind Jeremiah that false prophets are preaching against him. These themes of drought and curses, tree and blessings, and the purity of heart come together in this passage as God assures Jeremiah that he will survive even when all around him will fall.

Jeremiah 17:8 They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.

Have you ever gone through a rough patch, a dry season?

Where did you find your strength?

If it was effected more than just you, how did everyone else handle it?

Were there some that seemed to "roll" better then others? Why?

How can your faith help you find strength during this difficult times?

## Commentary on Luke 6:17-26

After the call of Simon, James, and John, Luke's story of Jesus continues with several healing stories and the call of Levi. Behind most of these stories is the growing tension between Jesus and the 'official' authorities. Luke then lists all the disciples in verse 12 and provides his shortened version of Matthew's sermon on the mount. The major difference between Matthew's beatitudes and Luke's version is the inclusion of "woes". This inclusion points to what writers have coined the Gospel's tendency to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable". For Luke, those who are too comfortable are deaf to the words of salvation because of their own sense of already being saved. Their prosperity for them is a sign of God's favor rather than an indication of the world's favor. The call of repentance is drowned out by the flattery of man. They are therefore to be pitied because they have chosen short term comfort over a long term salvation.

Luke 6:25 Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

Have you ever experienced "What goes up must come down"?

What did that teach you about handling life's swings?

Did you need faith more on the down swing or the up swing?

What if you relied on your faith equally? Would the swings be so traumatic?

What is Jesus saying about the swings of life?

Maybe curses occur when we rely too much on the world and blessings when we rely on God?

## Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

The rejection of Jesus' resurrection came from two different sources. The one source followed the Sadducees rejection of resurrection based on a form of Greek philosophy rooted in Platonism called Gnosticism. The Gnostic understanding of divinity was purely spiritual and rejected the material body and therefore a bodily resurrection. Gnosticism embraced the spiritual teachings of Jesus while rejecting the need for physical healing or the sanctity of bodily creation. At the time of Jesus, there

were stories of miracle workers as well as wise rabbis whose teachings were very close to Jesus. If we follow Jesus just because of his wise teaching or miracles, Paul says that we are most to be pitied. Even Jesus' suffering and death on the cross in which he forgave his captors was simply a noble death if not for the resurrection. The resurrection, for Paul, changes everything. The second source was from the "religious" Jews represented by the Pharisees who accepted the belief in the resurrection but only on the last day. The resurrection of Jesus by God not only validates all of Jesus' teachings but reveals him to be the first fruits of the end time resurrection. Death, which was the consequence of being expelled from Eden because of the sin of disobedience, has been overcome by the resurrection of Jesus. Adam's disobedience has been erased by Jesus' obedience. One man brought death and the other offers life. The resurrection not only means that Jesus is alive but that all who believe are given new life. Christ is Risen and so are we!

1 Corinthians 15:17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Who or what has the last word in your life?

If Jesus was crucified but not raised then wouldn't death have the final answer?

If Jesus is risen than who has the final answer?

If God is the final answer, then are we asking the right questions?

Instead of focusing on avoiding death, shouldn't we be focused on living with God?

If God is the judge and God has forgiven us, than who is left to judge us?

### **Reflection on Jeremiah 17:5-10, Luke 6:17-26, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

Sermon "On Whom do You Rely?"

While Luke seems to be speaking about the same lesson that Matthew describes called the Beatitudes, the focus is different. Matthew is speaking to those who are seeking God but appear to find the religion of the day lacking faith. Matthew uses terms like poor in spirit and people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Luke, on the other hand, appears to be addressing those who are experiencing the ups and downs of life in this world. The hungry will be filled but the full will be hungry. The common expression "what goes up must come down" comes to mind. For those who are on top feel an exaggerated sense of pride and accomplishment which will eventually lead to a humbling fall. Those who are at the bottom, however, must rely on God for everything. In this context, those who have learned to rely on God are blessed but woe to those who rely on their own strength for it will eventually fail them. We are always in a cycle of growth and death. Those who rely upon God will find that God is constant even in this cyclical life.

Jeremiah describes this reliance upon God as being rooted near a stream. Even during a drought, those trees will survive and even prosper. For Jeremiah, those who rely upon their own strength are cursed because they will suffer the worst when the droughts of life occur. As Isaiah states, "Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength". While Jeremiah and Jesus both seem to be condemning those who rely upon their own strength, this message should be heard through the ears of compassion. God knows how difficult it is for us when those we rely upon including ourselves fail. The heavens are filled with the prayers of those who's world has fallen down around them. The pain and the woe is heart wrenching to our God who so loved us that His incarnate Jesus died for us. The call of Jesus and Jeremiah is to begin relying upon God now. Find your strength in God's presence and love. That source will never die.

This is the importance of the resurrection for Paul. If Jesus simply taught power sermons like the Beatitudes or performed miracles, then we would be relying once again upon a human. Death would have the final word and the cycle of life would continue. Jesus, however, was raised from the dead and death did not have the final word. God's strength and God's love is greater than all of our ups and downs including death. When all else fails, God remains. The empty tomb breaks the cycle of

disappointments and failures. Kingdoms and religions ebb and flow but God remains constant. This is the message of the resurrection. The curses and woes are broken if we have faith in Jesus. Trusting in the Father's will above our own will never disappoint. The Holy Spirit will give us strength during the years of plenty and the times of drought. For in God, we are all truly blessed.