

## September 7, 2003 Pentecost 13

*“Ultimate Prosperity Depends on Trusting in the Lord”*

### **JEREMIAH 17:5-12**

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**T**his is what the LORD says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. <sup>6</sup> He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. <sup>7</sup> “But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. <sup>8</sup> He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” <sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? <sup>10</sup> “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” <sup>11</sup> Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool. <sup>12</sup> A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.

One job I did not like as a child was collecting the eggs in the hen house. I didn't like reaching into boxes where the hens were still sitting on the eggs. You never knew when one of them was in a brooding mood, making clucking sounds, and carefully guarding the eggs. Invariably they would peck at your hand as you removed the eggs, and the egg would drop out of your hand and break open on the ground. Why didn't we let the chickens sit on the eggs and incubate them? Because there were no roosters in the pen, and without being fertilized, the eggs would rot and decay instead of developing into little chicks.

In these words just read to you, the Lord compares people who put their trust in themselves and their ungodly gain of money as a partridge that sits on eggs that never hatch. People trust and treasure their money, their families, their friends, and the good lives they live like hens that gather eggs under their wings. Without Jesus everything in this life becomes like a nest full of rotten eggs, that never begets anything lasting and worthwhile.

This morning I want to direct your attention to those words of the prophet Jeremiah, for they make it very clear that **“Ultimate Prosperity Depends on Trusting in the Lord”** and not putting our trust in ourselves.

#### **1) The curse of trusting in yourself**

The late singer Frank Sinatra sang a song about trusting in himself, “I'll Do It My Way.” The Lord tells us this morning that if we want to do it ourselves, we are under a curse. “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength whose heart turns away from the Lord.” To be cursed means to go to hell. It means to hear the awful words on judgment day, “Depart from me you who are cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

In the original Hebrew language this sentence actually has two words for mankind or humans. The one word is "GIBBOR" and it means the person who is strong like a warrior. The other word is "ADAM" which means the one who is dust and dirt. When powerful people with big muscles, big brains and big appetites for power, trust in themselves, they are destined for failure, because they are ADAM or dust. Imagine if Arnold appeared before cameras and bulged his biceps, and said, "These muscles will make me a better governor." People would laugh at him and consider him the biggest joke in politics. Human beings are even more foolish when they trust in themselves, their muscles, their money, their power, and their brains, because sin has turned them into dust and dirt.

People by nature depend on flesh for strength. When the Bible uses the word "flesh" in this context, it refers to the flesh of human beings that is corrupted by sin. In Genesis 6 the Lord looked at the world and said, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." The Apostle Paul said, "I know that is in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing." Yet people put their trust in their flesh. They sincerely believe that they can get along without God because of the blood that flows through their veins and arteries and nourishes the cells in their bodies. Even worse they believe the good they try to produce in this life with their own bodies, will actually be good enough on the day of judgment to outweigh the evil that has been done. This is the ultimate example of corruption and decay, the inability to see how far they have fallen short of God's glory, and how their best deeds are like filthy rags in the sight of God.

Trusting in yourself is so dangerous because your human heart and feelings and emotions are totally unreliable, as the character Gollum says in "The Lord of the Rings," "tricksy." Verse 9 says "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" The word for deceive is related to the name Jacob, the deceiver, the liar, the heel grabber. Remember that nasty kid in second grade who stuck out his foot and tripped one of the girls as she walked by his desk? The human heart deceives, and tricks and twists the truth of God's word, filtering out only what it wants to hear and wants to think. The heart joyfully croons with Frank Sinatra, "I'll do it my way." Romans 8 goes further to say that the natural mind of man is "hostile" to God. It convinces you that God's plan to save you is something you should hate and despise. It twists you into thinking that you are able to produce something worthy inside of you that God will honor and reward on judgment day.

What about the people who put their trust in themselves? The Lord compares them to a bush in the wasteland. "He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives." The word that is translated "wasteland" is actually ARABAH from which we get the word "Arabia" and "Arab." That land east and south of the Jordan River was a wasteland, where few plants could grow because of the heat, and the lack of moisture and the salt in the soil. Sink your roots and your hope into yourself, and into what this life offers you, and your own ideas and thoughts, and you will be a bush in the wasteland. Without Jesus we are "without God and without hope."

Another picture that describes how cursed we are if we do not trust in the Lord is that of the partridge sitting on eggs it cannot hatch. "Like the partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means." The New King James more accurately translates this "As a partridge that broods but does not hatch." The thought is here of sitting on eggs, but never seeing them hatch. This happens when the eggs are not

fertilized by the male rooster. How ironic that we even describe gathering riches together for retirement as "building a nest egg." What lasts forever is not how much money you have in the bank, or how much you have enjoyed life to the full, or how many acts of kindness you have produced. What lasts is a life that is built on Jesus, a branch connected to Jesus the vine, a body attached to Christ who sits on the right hand of God.

Some of the chickens on the family farm lived in the hen house, and others roamed freely. Hens would sneak away and lay their eggs in the hay undetected, and unfertilized. Sometimes there was many as a dozen eggs in a nest and they were rotten. We took the rotten eggs and played catch with them, until one of them would break, or we would throw up against the wall and the unbelievable stench of rotten egg would fill the air. A rotten egg? A bush in the desert? Is that what you want for your life? No, by God's grace your life is connected to Jesus. Instead of being under a curse, and destined to rot forever in eternal death and punishment, your life is blessed, blessed forever in Jesus.

## **2) The blessing of trusting in Jesus**

The Lord tells us how blessed we are when we put our trust in him. Verse 7 says, "But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him." Once again the first reference to man uses the Hebrew word "GIBBOR" which means someone strong and mighty. That word was used to describe Jesus in Isaiah 9:6 as the child who is born to us is the "mighty God." You can be strong. You can have good health. You can have success in life. You can even have a large nest egg built up for your future. Your real blessing is not in who you are or what you have, but in the Lord. That's the ultimate nest egg that allows us to live forever in the place Jesus has prepared for us. That gives you hope and confidence for the future that is totally unshaken. Hebrews says, "faith is the evidence of things not seen." Hope is believing something is real even before it happens.

Let an illustration help us understand this better. If I take this avocado seed and plant it, I can hope that it will produce a tree that will bear fruit. Most likely the seed will produce a wild avocado that will bear fruit that is not all that good to eat. I would be much better off to plant a tree from the nursery that has grafted onto a wild root, a Hass, or Bacon, or Fuerte or Rincon. What if by some miracle of God I planted a seed in the ground, and was given a vision of the tree 20 years from now. It would be large tree, covering my whole front yard, bursting with fruit, some of the best in the world. That's what faith and hope is. We build our lives on Christ, with the clear vision, that the perfect life Jesus lived for us, and the death he died, will be there for us to protect us from the curse of sin. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

The Lord compares our trust in him to a tree in the desert planted next to the water. "He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." You dear Christian, are that tree. You have been rooted and established in Jesus. Your life is connected to the precious blood of Jesus shed for your forgiveness, and grounded in his resurrection from the dead that pronounced to the world the Father accepted the sacrifice the Son made for us. Your standing with God never changes even though your life can change dramatically. Goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life.

If this picture of the tree planted by the water gets your attention this morning, then look also at verse 12. "A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary." I need to have a place where I am safe to escape judgment day when it comes. I have that safe place, that sanctuary, that refuge. It is the glorious throne of my God that was exalted from the beginning, even before the world began. The Lord God who rules the world in majesty, established a sanctuary, by having Jesus come into his presence with the sacrificial payment I need for my sin. The Old Testament tabernacle and temple, pictured the blood of Jesus being shed in the presence of the Father for my sin. Colossians 3 says that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father. It tells us to fix our eyes on things above and even says, "For you died and your life is now hidden in Christ with God." Its already hidden in Christ, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. It's already there in the Sanctuary. It is a done deal. That's the ultimate prosperity that lasts forever. Amen.