

February 11, 2007
Epiphany 6

"Trust Only in the Lord for Your Salvation"

JEREMIAH 17:5-8

This 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸ 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."

It was an amazing story that came over the evening news on September 3, 1987. A small 15 passenger Beechcraft 99 commuter plane took off from Lewiston, Maine bound for Boston without passengers. The pilot heard an unusual sound coming from the back of the aircraft. He turned over the controls to the copilot to check things out. As he approached the exit door that dropped down from the rear, the small plane hit an air pocket. Captain Dempsey was thrown forward against the back door that had not been closed properly. The door popped open and the stairs dropped down. He was sucked out of the plane as it was flying over the ocean. The copilot saw the red light come on indicating the door had opened. He radioed for an emergency landing and also called for Coast Guard helicopters to begin an immediate search for Dempsey's body in the ocean.

What the copilot did not realize was Captain Henry Dempsey's presence of mind to grab onto the railing of the stairway. His feet were in the plane and his face was down on the last step as the plane traveled along at 200 miles per hour, but somehow he held on. He held on as the plane started its descent for an emergency landing. He held on as the plane made contact with the runway, his face only a foot from the concrete. He hung on when the plane applied its brakes and came to a halt. When rescue arrived he even held on when they said it was safe to let go. In fact he could not let go. It took rescue workers more than 15 minutes to pry his fingers from the rail. Talk about holding on for dear life.

I begin with this story because the words that we just heard from Jeremiah speak to us about trust, trust in the Lord. When we trust in the Lord we do not want to hold on lightly to what we have in Christ, we want to hold on tightly, not for dear life but for eternal life. This morning we want to speak to you on this important thought, "Trust Only in the Lord for Your Salvation."

Trust in yourself and you will fail like a bush in the wasteland

Here is what the Lord says about failing to trust in him. "This 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.'" The person who trusts in anything human for escape from the judgment to come is under a curse. The word for curse has the thought of being bound and separated, the way a prisoner might be bound and put into jail. We first hear

this word in Genesis 3 when God said to the serpent that he was cursed about all the livestock and all the wild animals. The Lord cursed the ground because of Adam's fall into sin so that it would bear thorns and thistles. The ultimate curse that all people face is the curse of eternal death as Romans 6 tells us, "The wages of sin is death." We even hear people curse other people by using God's name to damn them to hell.

The last place I want to put my trust is in myself because this verse tells me, "Cursed is the one who trust in man." The Hebrew uses two words for man in this verse. The first word is "man" in the sense of "a strong man." The second word for man is the familiar word "Adam" which has the meaning of dirt. A strong man would be a total fool if he put his trust in something that is like dirt, or weak, or had no strength. What if Captain Dempsey had said to himself as he fell out of the plane, "I am a pilot, I can fly by flapping my arms as fast as a humming bird." Or what if he had said, "I am a good swimmer, so what if I drop 4000 feet into the ocean, I can make it." Every person born into this world thinks they can soar back to God on their own strength and power. They do not understand what it means to be under the curse of sin and how that curse cannot be removed by any human effort.

You cannot win points with God the way you might buy the perfect Valentine card or gift or flowers for someone you love. I heard once that Valentine's Day is a stressful time for a lot of guys because they try to come up with the perfect gift that they hope will make up for some of the bad things done in the past. We are born into this world thinking we have the strength within ourselves, to tap our resources or power in ourselves to make ourselves worthy. What we don't realize is how corrupted we have become. When we depend on our flesh or our internal thought patterns, even our feelings and emotions as the touchstone of truth, we turn away from God's plan to rescue us. The next verse in this chapter says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

The famous boxer Mohammed Ali was flying on an airplane and the flight attendant politely told him, "Mr. Ali, you need to put your seat belt on." Ali responded playfully, "Superman don't need no seat belt." The flight attendant handled his banter brilliantly when she said, "Mr. Ali if you were superman you would not need to be flying on this plane."

All of us come into this world with a firm trust in ourselves, that we are like superman, the philosopher Nietzsche's famous "Ubermuench" who is captain of his own fate and master of his own soul. Reminds me of a young man I once knew who said he did not need to come to church and he did not need the Lord in his life. He had a job climbing poles and stringing cable. He was proud of his strong body. He bragged about falling off a pole from 15 feet and walked away without even being hurt. That was 30 years ago.

What happens to the people who proudly put their trust in themselves, or their riches, or the choices they have made, or their good lives they live instead of putting their trust in the Lord? "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 Hebrew word for "wasteland" is arabah from which we get the word "Arabia." Only the scrawniest, ugliest, thorniest, and driest plants can survive that desert region of the world. The rains that come across the Mediterranean never make it out into the desert similar to what happens also here in California. How different were the fruit trees, grape vines, and flowers, and grasses that grow in Palestine when it was the land of milk and honey. Listen again to the words of Psalm 1 that we sang a few minutes ago, "Therefore the wicked will

not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.”

You and I were born into this wasteland. We were without God and without hope, dead in trespasses and sin, according to Ephesians 2. But the Lord took us when we were under a curse and transplanted us into Christ, the way you might take a plant and put it next to a source of water so it can prosper.

Trust in the Lord and you will prosper like a tree by the rivers of water

How beautiful is the life of the person who trusts in the Lord. “But blessed is the man who trust in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.” The real superman, the man who can survive the judgment to come and escape the curse of sin does not look into himself for strength. He is blessed because he has been led by God’s grace to look to the Lord and puts his trust in the Lord. The word for “blessed” is “baruch.” It has the thought of bending down before someone and then having that person help you. Remember how Ruth was gleaning grain in the field one kernel at a time. Then Boaz called for her to come to him and hold out her shawl that she was wearing. He filled it full of grain. We come to the Lord with nothing and he gives us everything. As we sing, “Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling.”

Our trust and our confidence is in the Lord. Psalm 28:7 says, “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.” Psalm 37:5 says, “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: Psalm 118 says, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” This is just a small sampling of verses that encourage us to trust in the Lord. We also think of other verses such as Isaiah 40 that says, “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings of eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” The Lord who asks for our trust is also the same Lord who leads us to trust in him by giving us the faith to believe in his power and strength to rescue us. We think of man who told Jesus, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”

And what does a person look like who puts their trust in the Lord? “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 worry in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” When the winter storms come to California, the mountains catch the moisture as it moves over the Pacific in the form of snow or rain. The water fills the mountains, and is slowly released into the streams throughout the year. The mighty oak trees that grow along the stream do not have to be concerned about the summer months when it does not rain. Their roots have found their way into the soil alongside of the stream that is wet with moisture from the stream. Year after year they bear their acorns for the animals to eat. Their leaves are always green. The Chumash Indians always had a good supply of acorns from these trees that grew where there was water in the ground from the streams that flowed.

The Lord came to you, dear Christian, and took you as a dead plant living in the wasteland, and he transplanted you and sunk your roots deeply into Jesus and his death, and his

resurrection. The Word of God has kept this faith and trust alive in you. You have been led to put your trust in Christ and Christ alone. You know how worthless it would be to try and add anything of your own to what Christ has done. Listen to the words of Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

Think of all the good fruit you are privileged to bring forth in your life this coming week, because your trust is in Christ and Christ alone.

You want your life deeply rooted in Christ. You want your trust in Jesus to be such a firm grip, nothing can pry it loose, tighter than the pilot who gripped the stairs as the plane landed. That’s the tight grip the Lord has given to you, a grip on Jesus you want to see strengthened everyday through God’s Word. Amen.