

**Jeremiah 17: 5-14; “Trusting in Man or God?”, Sermon # 17 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned by a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered as a Communion Sermon by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The verses that we have before us show us that each and every person is trusting in someone and something which they believe will sustain them, and satisfy them, and profit them in this life. The real question is, will their trust have been rightly placed when it comes their time to die? But even if you are considering the outcome for believers and unbelievers in this life, the results of trusting in God versus trusting in man are greatly different. So let us ask ourselves 2 questions this afternoon before we partake of the Lord’s Supper. 1<sup>st</sup> - What are the descriptions of a man trusting in man versus his trusting in God? 2<sup>nd</sup> - What are the consequences of man’s trusting in man versus their trusting in God? And then when we come to partake of the Supper we will consider Who it is that we are trusting in, and whether we are glorying in Him.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – What are the descriptions of a man trusting in man versus his trusting in God?**

The word “trust” in the Hebrew is “Batach”, which means to lean upon or to be confident in, and it is the same word in both verses 5 and 7. The man who is trusting in man is trusting in himself, or in other men. He is described for us here in 3 ways. He makes flesh his strength, his heart departs from the Lord, and he gets riches but not by right. Let’s consider each of these individually. The man trusting in man makes flesh his strength. That is, he places all his confidence in his bodily strength, the strength of his nation, or his friends, or his weapons, or even in his own cleverness or riches. He boasts in what he can do, or what he is by nature, or in what he has attained to in knowledge or ability. He is quite convinced that he can handle life and whatever comes to him, because he believes in himself. He does not think that he needs God’s approval in the things that he does; he has his own approval, and that of his friends. Ask yourself now, if there is anything of this type of attitude in you? Do you sense your total dependence upon God for food, or clothing, or strength, or any good thing which God has given you? Do you think you owe all the good that you have experienced to yourself? Do you believe that you have the right to judge for yourself whether God has really been faithful to you in the various situations of your life? I can assure you that He has been faithful. Do you really understand that God is the One who has given you your life, and that He can weaken it, or take it away altogether at any time? Although I am speaking primarily to the unbeliever, I am also speaking to those who understand themselves to be Christians.

I was once like this myself as an unbeliever. I once was young and foolish and thought that I would always be physically strong. When I was in high school I had a friend named Steve Spencer. He was a very tall young man, very strong and healthy from all outward appearances. His friends had nick-named him “spidey” because of his height and the fact that he had long legs and arms. But then something happened to my friend’s strength. In our first year of college he found out that he had a lymphatic cancer, a cancer which showed up first in his leg. It had formed a tumor there, and so the doctors had to amputate his leg from the knee down. He did recover from this, and for a time it looked like all was going to be well. He learned to do many things to cope with the loss of his leg during that time; riding his bicycle and other things to exercise. But then about a year later it came back, and try as they might, the doctors could not help him. He grew weaker and weaker. This was before I became a Christian. I remember going to visit Steve in the hospital, and tried to understand how he was coping with this. We had both gone First Presbyterian Church in Davenport, Iowa, and I think that he was trying to understand what it meant to believe in Christ. He confessed that he did not believe that he was

going to live, and inside I was angry. I was not angry at him; I was angry at God. How could God have allowed this strong young man to come into this impossibly difficult situation? Why did people have to die anyway? And I held this as a grudge against God for some time.

These things had never been Biblically explained to me; and so I was greatly upset. I did not understand that it was because of Adam's sin in the beginning, that all men die. I did not understand that sin's entrance into the world was man's fault and not God's. Perhaps something like this has happened to you. You may have lost a loved one or a friend and you think that God is to be blamed; He is not to be trusted. What was my real problem? I was not willing to trust in a God who would not help me on my own terms, and therefore I was willing to judge God. I was not willing to trust in a God who would not always rescue people from death. I did not realize that there are many things in life which are difficult and hard to understand because of sin. I was trusting in man, and what man could do for himself. But since no man could help my friend Steve, I blamed God for not helping him; for not delivering him from an early death. Steve did die a few weeks later, and although I was greatly affected by his death, I still did not trust in the Lord for a number of years. But our text says: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord" "For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of draught, nor will cease from yielding fruit." Notice the strength and confidence of the person trusting in God and hoping in God. That person puts down roots in a relationship with God, by faith in Jesus Christ, and they then find themselves by a river of grace. They will not fear when the heat comes; the bad tidings of approaching difficulty or death. Even through those times, they will trust in God and bear fruit for Him.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> description of a man trusting in man is that his heart departs from the Lord. God is not in all their thoughts. They are self-centered and man-centered, and their heart does not go out to God, but rather it goes away from Him. This man trusting in man does not desire the knowledge of God's ways. They do not want Christ to rule over them. They run from God and the truth about themselves and their sin. Their heart departs from God because it is desperately wicked; it is deceitful. But now, I also need to ask the Christians here this afternoon: Is this in some measure you, as well? You who are Christians may be making excuses as to why you cannot serve God, and why you think that you must continue on in your own way of thinking, rather than pressing on to know the Lord according to the Bible, and His good way of doing things. An unbeliever runs from God and the truth about themselves because they do not desire the knowledge of His ways. They run from God because they do not want Christ to rule over them. They do not really want to deal with their sins. But you who are Christians, you have come to faith in Christ, and you have confessed that you do want to deal with all of your sins. Therefore let this ordinance of the Lord's Supper be a means of grace to you here this afternoon. If you have sinful weaknesses and besetting sins, you must confess them with a view to the Lord's helping you to deal with them. Pray as you come to the table, that your heart will not be wandering away from the Great Shepherd. Pray that He would seek you, the wandering sheep, as the Psalmist prays in Psalm 119, verse 176 – "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget your commandments." Ah, what joy there is to be found in this. Even the joy of bringing joy to the Lord of glory Himself, and the holy angels which Jesus speaks about in Luke 15: 4 – "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?" "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons who need no repentance."

The 3<sup>rd</sup> description of a man trusting in mankind is when a man gets riches, but not by right. He does not see God's way of diligence, hard work, or saving as being desirable or feasible to sustain his great desire to get all the gusto he can out of life. And so he goes to the gambling casino, and he plays the lottery as well. He thinks that winning would be the solution to all of his problems. He wants it all handed to him at once and all will be well. He would then be thankful to God and tithe on his winnings. He would build a church for God's people, give most of his money to his relations, and still have enough for himself. But all of these good intentions are like the partridge that sits on eggs but does not hatch them. Many people have good intentions which do not come to fruition in the right way because God is not pleased to bless what He sees as sinful. Are communities and households to run by gamblers and lottery winnings? Are people made wise stewards of God's good gifts by such things? Even if a man would win the lottery the true riches of Christ are not seen. Therefore Jesus says in Mark 8, verse 36 - "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." The choice of what is most important to you is set before you this afternoon as you will come to the Lord's Table: Will you cultivate the things of Christ in your heart; the truths of what He has done for you in dying for your sins? And will you let this trust transform you so that you will not be ashamed to trust in his strength, rather than your own fleshly wisdom and strength? Do you really need lots of money for your soul to be satisfied? Will you own the Savior's life, death, and resurrection, and His words, to be of such great value that you cultivate a life of faith in Him; trusting in Him for every good thing, and for Him to change you so that you love the pursuit of spiritual things more than you love to pursue material things? Do you find yourself pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness? Are you fighting the good fight of faith?

**2<sup>nd</sup> - Let us ask this question: What are the consequences of man's trusting in man versus their trusting in God?** (verses 6 and 9)

The consequences are 3 also, in our text. 1<sup>st</sup> - He will be like a shrub in the desert, it says in verse 6. He will be like a shriveled up, dried up plant in the desert. The sin of trusting in man is so all pervasive that over time it dries up your soul and everything in your life; so that there is nothing green there, spiritually speaking. Oh, the unbeliever may flourish for a time in earthly and material things. But their love of putting men in the place where God ought to be gradually takes away the moisture of the common grace which God has given to their lives. God would have all men to consider that He is the One who makes all things true and beautiful. But because men fail to consider this, their sin in this regard leaves them feeling disappointed, empty, and miserable inside. There is a certain hopeless disappointed feeling that comes after a while, to people who are trusting in themselves and other people, alone. What was it that caused Robin Williams to take his own life the other day, after such a long-running successful film career? He was admired and loved by many people. But he could not sustain all the expectations of people around him, nor could he sustain his own expectations he had of himself. He was coming to the end of his earthly strength. And so he took his life.

Oh, the deceitfulness of men's hearts apart from grace! Our text says: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately wicked; who can know it?" Many people do not want to see that it is God alone who makes all things beautiful and pleasurable and profitable. But when a person trusts in the Lord, they come to see and learn this truth of how God can bless them. He blesses us when we learn to trust in Him. We learn to look for Christ's grace to help us to learn how to think rightly and act rightly. And we learn to rejoice in Christ's good work at the cross. Listen to Hosea Chapter 14, verse 1. O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; take words with you and return to the Lord." "Say to Him,

“Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.” “Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘You are our gods.’” “For in You the fatherless finds mercy.” “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him.” “I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon.” “His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.” “Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine.” “Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.” “Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I to do anymore with idols?’” “I have heard and observed him.” “I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me.” This is what trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ brings to the New Covenant believer. It brings the recognition that all of the Christian’s fruit is from Christ and His grace.

Furthermore, if you only trust in man, you shall not see when good comes. How can you see when good comes; when God, the source of all blessings and good is ignored, and the supposed wisdom of men is exalted? When men are left to themselves, to boast only in each other’s greatness and earthly wisdom, they will only learn to forget God altogether. They become all confused and twisted in their thinking when they only trust in other people around them. What should a Christian do when they find that they have fallen into this mindset? They should remember and heed the admonition of Psalm 118, verse 8. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.” Let us remember, anew and afresh, as we come to the Lord’s Table, that no man ever can be saved by the best of their works, even though they may have been the most moral person who has ever lived. Why? Because God law demands perfection from every man, and He cannot find it in you. And so what did He have to do? He had to send His own Son to be a substitutionary sacrifice for every sinner who will trust in Him. If you will not trust in the Lord, the outcome of your life is described in verse 6 of our text: “He shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. That will be the experience of his soul without grace. But listen once again to verse 7 of our text: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and who hope is the Lord.” “For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.” Let us now come down front and renew our covenant of faith with our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only One who can give us grace so that we can bear good fruit.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – As we come to partake of the Lord’s Supper, let us remember Who it is that we are trusting in, and let us glory in Him.**

Verse 14 says: “Heal me and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise.” The reason that we can put our full trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is because He is perfect. He is perfect in that He is God; but He is also perfect in that He is glorified humanity. “There is a man in the glory,” Pastor Bob Vogel used to say. And he is right. There should be no question in our minds that the Lord Jesus can, and He will, heal all the sin-sickness of our souls. When we first came to Christ we prayed a prayer something like that of our text: “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” And as Christians, we should still be praying this prayer. We should be continually be drawing near to Christ when we see the remaining sinful corruption of our hearts; for He is the fountain of life, and we have an Advocate with the Father. Dear Christian, Jesus knows your longing for holiness; He knows your struggle with indwelling remaining corruption in your heart, and He is still willing to forgive you and cleanse you from every spot and stain of sin. Remember this as you partake of the Supper, for He died for this very thing. Ponce-de-Leon was the man who sought for an earthly fountain; that if a man drank from it he would regain his youth. I would ask that you would seek the Lord Jesus, even now, as the fountain of living waters, as you partake of this Supper. Come to Him

and be cleansed of guilt and sin, anew and afresh. Since Jesus has died for your sins, I would urge you to declare to Him in your heart that He is your praise as verse 14 of our text states.