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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 27, 2015
18th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 2 Corinthians 7:6-10; Luke 7:36-50

Hymns: 279; 324:1-6; 652; 777; (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 17:5-10

5 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man
And makes flesh his strength,
Whose heart departs from the LORD.

6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,
And shall not see when good comes,
But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,
In a salt land which is not inhabited.

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
And whose hope is the LORD.

8 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.

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: (Jeremiah's ministry)

Jeremiah was the last of the prophets in Jerusalem before the Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city. For generations the Lord had sent His prophets calling for repentance, warning of judgment, but the people wouldn't listen. Even when some of the kings of Judah initiated reforms, all too often the very next king would revert back to the evil ways of idolatry and many if not most of the people willingly followed.

The words of the Lord through the prophets fell on deaf ears, and stone cold hearts. Even when the Lord gave them one final opportunity to survive if only they would repent, and turn to the Lord, they turned to Egypt for deliverance from their enemies instead of the Lord. So much of Old Testament Bible History speaks to us of the longsuffering nature of God and deceitfulness of man's heart. The lesson which the Lord would have us learn is how one goes about --

THEME: Surviving the Deceitfulness of Man's Heart.

To do that we must --

I. Realize the Threat of the Deceit of the Heart of Man.

Jeremiah 17:5-6 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD. 6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

God is NOT saying that we shouldn't trust other people. We need to trust others. We need to trust our doctor or lawyer, or pastor, as individuals who have an expertise in a certain area that will bring us help in time of need. That kind of trust is not what the Lord was concerned about with the people of Judah, or with us today. The Lord didn't just say "**cursed is the man who trusts in man,**"; but continued "**and makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs**

from the Lord” (v.5) It is when we replace God in our hearts, and turn away from God to trust another, turn away from God to find truth and guidance and security for life in man, and man’s wisdom, and man’s righteousness, that we would be cursed. Then we are living in a spiritual desert, indeed our text likens such a spiritual place to something like the great salt flats of the western United States. It isn’t a place where anything can live. It is too hot, too dry, and too harsh with all the salt in the soil. Anything that tries to grow is parched. So our text makes this conclusion concerning man’s heart:

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

The heart of man is not only desperately wicked, it is desperately sick. That is what the Lord is actually saying here. The Lord says that the heart of man is so sick it is sick unto death! It is deceitful above all things. Jesus spoke to the nature of the heart of unregenerate man.

Mark 7:20-23 And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

We may like to blame those around us. We may attempt to lay responsibility for our sin on others. It is common to hear of criminal saying of the victims, “They were asking for it! They got what was coming to them.” They blame the victim whether the crime be fraud, or assault or slander or any other grievous sin. The sinner looks at others as being at fault, at least partially to blame. The thing is we were all like that from childhood, from the time when we said to our mothers, “He hit me first,” or “She took my toy!” The Lord looks at the heart and says, “**the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth**”(Genesis 8:21). And so the Jesus’ conclusion; the heart is corrupt, and all kinds of evil come from within man, and defile each and every one of us.

The thing is, this isn't just about others. This is about us. This is about our sinful nature still asserting itself in our lives. With the question in our text, "**Who can know it?**" the Lord is also emphasizing for us that we don't comprehend the true extent of our own sin. The psalmist leads us to confess and pray to the Lord:

Psalm 19:12-13 "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me."

There are so many sins we are not even consciously aware of and yet they are sins that condemn us! Then there are presumptuous sins coming from our own arrogance. We presume to know what's best for us. We presume to know what's right in a given circumstance, even when it is contrary to the express will of God laid out for us plainly in His Word. We are presumptuous enough to assert ourselves not only above our neighbor, but above God, discrediting what He says, and elevating our own wisdom and will, and wants and desires above the Lord. That is the nature of the heart of man.

This is the evil that brings upon man the curse of God so that we cannot flourish. Do you realize how we are threatened by the deceit of our own hearts? How can we, how dare we trust in man, and look to man for our strength, or for our righteousness, turning away from the Lord?

Our text would lead us to --

II. Trust the Integrity of God.

Jeremiah 17:7-8,10 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD. 8 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."

Trust in the Lord and you will be blessed. Hope in the Lord for forgiveness and life and you will be blessed forevermore.

In our gospel lesson this morning we read of how the sinful woman put her trust in Jesus. She came to Him trusting the forgiveness that is offered in His name. She humbled herself in love before the Lord. Her actions spoke loudly of her love and her absolute confidence that in spite of the gravity of her sin, Jesus loved her. And yes, He assured her before all present that her sins were forgiven. This faith, this trust in Jesus was life changing for this woman. It prompted her actions to boldly come to the Lord before all the men at dinner, and to humbly offer her sacrifice of thanksgiving. Her love and gratitude for the Lord's grace was evident in her actions.

So let us also learn that lesson and learn it well. Then we also shall be like a tree planted by the waters. Our roots of faith will be refreshed with the gospel of God's love and forgiveness, **“for when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us”** (Titus 3:4-5). This is the amazing wonder of the free flowing streams of God's love and grace. He does not wait for us to prove ourselves worthy of His forgiveness. Then forgiveness would be of works and not of grace. Then we would be back to trusting in ourselves and our merit. No! What is most wondrous about God is that He has delivered us from the treachery and deceitful wickedness of our own hearts. **“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him”** (Romans 5:8-9).

Faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior is a life changing power in our lives. John lays out the beauty of the connection of gospel and life in first epistle where he wrote.

1 John 3: 18-21 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. 20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Do you see how these words of John compliment the words of our text? Jesus brings refreshing to our souls. Jesus brings strength to our lives so that we bear fruit, and we live without fear of a “drought” of God’s providence or grace in our lives. We flourish in during the trying times in life because we know the power of God’s gracious presence in our lives. John’s encouragement to be confident toward God is also presented in our text.

Jeremiah 17:10 “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.”

We no longer need to fear that the Lord knows our hearts. Yes, it may cause us to shudder when we recall that the Lord knows our every sinful thought, and knows the evil that still rises up in our lives. **But God is greater than our hearts.** God the Holy Spirit has given us a new regenerate heart, a heart of faith and love toward God. God who created this new heart within us knows this regenerated heart, and knows our Spirit blessed minds. He will judge according to our doings that flow from faith and love toward God. This is no contradiction as we recall how our new life is according to God’s power in the gospel for “**the new man to daily appear and arise who lives eternally before God in righteousness and purity**” (Luther’s Small Catechism, Baptism 4). It is God’s blessing in our lives that these fruits of faith appear, not only to give our lives meaning and purpose, but also to assure of God’s presence in our hearts and in our lives. He has given us life that will be ours here in time and hereafter in eternity.

We survive the deceitfulness of man’s heart by trusting the integrity of God’s gospel promise. This is His gracious good will, and it shall be done among us also. To God all praise and glory!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.