Jeremiah 17:5-10 and Luke 6: 17-26 – Shrubs, trees, poverty and richness

Jeremiah – prophet in Judah at the time of the kings. Prophetic ministry lasted 40 years and was toward the end of the kings of Judah before exiling to Egypt at around age of 70 year.

Jeremiah warns “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for their strength”.

To get the most of this prophecy we need to look at what was happening in Judah.

People reliant on a king to make the decisions for the country. The kings at the time were constantly swaying, I was thinking of comparing to a pendulum, but they are constant. The kings were all over the place.

Rather than relying on God they relied on their own treaties being made with their own advisers. Currently we have a Queen, but the political power of our country relies upon our government. I can imagine to a degree how the Israelites in Judah may have been feeling! Our prime minister making alliances within his own party, but then they fall apart, and the nation is left reeling. It feels out of my control.

The king in Judah as well as forming alliance with advisors, who were always trying to outdo each other, also relied on their wives and marriages, their links and treaties with other countries such as Egypt and Assyria. They relied on the strength of their army, as well as those whom they formed alliances with and their negotiations.

As well as all this, their political alliances being formed, they were straying by worshiping other gods. Even the temple was desecrated with idols being introduced.

Jeremiah was prophesying to everyone though – yes, the kings and the nation as a whole, but that is made up of individual people. I may not have trust and control over the government, but I do have the individual choice to trust in God for those actions I can take and seek His counsel for those I should take.

At the time of Jeremiah, other false prophets were telling everyone that Judah would be OK, that God’s forgiveness would happen despite their actions of trusting others.

Jeremiah was truthfully imparting God’s words. The nation was going to be exiled. God’s decision had already been made, but He is now interested in individuals trusting in Him through the consequence of the past actions.

It is the same for us today. Everyone lives in the consequences of past actions. Some of our own making – such as making a good investment and able to live off the bounty of the financial gain. For others an investment that made a loss. Telling a little white lie – that has come back to haunt us. This often is accentuated in TV shows. Someone loses their job and hides it from their family or friends. Either they end up in debt in dramas, or else someone sees them, and the lie escalates with no detrimental outcome and laughs along the way in a comedy.

In real life think of what the outcome would truly be. Friends and family finding out, the shame of lying to them, the feeling of worthlessness of not finding another job. How would those who had been told the lie feel? Anger? Pity? Loss of trust.

What about consequences we are living in due to other people’s actions? Reflect on your own life circumstances.

Even when something has been put right, the consequence still remains. It was the same for Judah. The Babylonians would overcome them, and they would be exiled.

God spoke through Jeremiah that although that was going to happen – He was NOT going to desert them. He promises that He will remain with them, continue to be their God and redeem them. The only requirement from anyone was to trust solely in God and remain faithful to Him.

God gave the prophecy that those who put their trust in the strength and wisdom of other men or women would be like a bush in the wastelands. A bush that did not have roots deep enough to reach water. The best outcome would be that it merely existed, no growth or fruit.

For those who trust in the Lord, they would be like a tree planted by water, sending out roots so that no matter what happens, fruit will still form – it will never fail to fulfil what it was created to do.

He did not promise that anyone would be immune from the exile. He did not promise that they would not have to succumb to another power. He did not promise that Israel or Judah would remain as a nation. He simply promised that He would be with those who trusted in Him and that they would become what He had created them to be – and in time He would restore them.

When we then hear the words of Jesus in the Luke passage – is it not a similar message?

We meet Jesus in the passage with a large crowd gathering. Some to hear His message while others wanted healing. Jesus did not make any distinction between what was being sought, He did not insist that everyone had to hear what He said first and then begin the healing ministry. He was simply interested in people seeking Him.

He then begins with stating those who are blessed. Those who are poor, those who hunger, those who weep and those who are insulted and hated because of their trust in God through Jesus, His Son. He then moves on with the counter-balance of “woes”, which is more correctly translated as “Alas” – more a compassionate comment that He mourns for those with the incorrect attitudes.

Blessed are those who are poor – woe to those who are rich. Is this a statement with regard to money and possessions? Or is it more likely to be poor in Spirit? Either way, those who have much of anything lose sight of relying on others. They put their trust in the things that they have, things that are seen. For those who are poor, they learn to overcome any shame in looking for help from others. It is an attitude of reliance compared to independence.

Whether you have much money or not, keep your eyes focused on God and do not rely on possessions – they can be taken away at any moment.

Blessed are those who are hungry – woe to those who are well fed now. Again, this is likely to imply hungry for more of God. Those who are hungry are not satisfied, they continue to search for what they need. Spiritually, we should never be satisfied. Are we perfect Christians? Do we know everything? Have we lived our life to the full and now have nothing left to offer?

Blessed are those who weep, woe to you who laugh now. Does that mean that because I watch comedy shows and laugh that I am not living a life desired by God – and someone who cries a lot is living a Godly life? Or does it mean deeper than that – those who weep for injustice, who weep when evil and sin is the victor in the earthly realms – when the pain and suffering of those around touch your heart you are seeing with the eyes of Jesus. Those who take no notice of injustice in the world and creation and rather build up their own comfort and security and not helping those who are vulnerable are living outside the desires of God, given through His laws.

Blessed are you when people hate you and reject you because of Jesus – woe to you when all people speak well of you. We must remember that end part to the blessing “BECAUSE OF JESUS”. It does not mean that any bullying is a good thing. But if people reject you because you are living for Jesus, maintaining His desires and laws on your life, then you will be blessed because of who Jesus is. For those who are respected by everyone, who never upsets anyone, then somewhere along the line you have compromised your belief or principles.

It does not mean that you have to go out of your way to upset people – but if we live a life that is honouring Jesus, then we will unsettle people. Very often it is not always about what we have done or are doing, but rather it highlights the wrong attitudes of people. Rejection and persecution normally emanate from fear or a lack of control. Jeremiah was not known by the amount of friends he had, which were minimal, but for the truth that he continued to speak.

If we are blessed by being poor and therefore relying on God, blessed by being hungry for more of God in our life and not simply satisfied with what has been achieved, blessed by being moved to tears of compassion for injustice and blessed because we are rejected because of our faith, then it must mean that our attitude must be in accordance with what God desires – an attitude of trust in Him.

We will have to live in the consequences of past actions – whether our own doing or that of others. It is not God’s punishment – consequences cannot just be swept away. But no matter what circumstance we are in we must trust that God is walking with us. His desire is for a relationship with each of us so that no matter where we are we will be a well-watered tree. Often in dry places the roots will need to go deep – but God and His faithfulness is our river.

Explain picture of a tree at the end of the drive, withered. But as the roots received healing, the tree was able to thrive and the leaves and fruit grew over to form an archway on the drive of the church. Hence my perseverance with the tree of blessing now planted out there.

In scripture, these desires have been written many times – in OT and NT. This passage in Luke is NOT the same incident as the sermon on the mount as he begins with it stating they were on level ground. It is implied and likely that Jesus repeated this message, which mirrors what God continually spoke in the OT on several occasions.

If we reject settling as being a parched bush in wasteland and we continue to search for more of Jesus, to trust in Him more and more, then we will all become and continue to be trees bearing fruit. We will be given the fruit in accordance with our individual, unique creation – apple trees cannot grow oranges – and it will be in the exact season that it is required. Perhaps more easily understood “the right words at the right time”. As we fulfil our purpose for Jesus we will move from poverty into His glorious riches.