

The Fruitlessness of Men

TEXT: Various Passages in Jeremiah.

THESIS:

INTRODUCTION:

1. I'm aware that we can be in the most spiritual situations and yet still be barren or unfruitful.
 - a. In 2 Pet. 1:8ff, Peter shows us that man can lead a barren and unfruitful life.
 - b. That, man is blind and oftentimes cannot see the purpose, meaning, and significance of life (vs. 9).
 - c. That, man forgets and does not know how to deal with sin or at least he is unwilling to give up his sin (vs. 10).
 - i. Thus, he is barren, he is fruitless in his life.
2. But, how can one keep from falling in life, from failing, from coming up short?
 - a. How can man know how to meet his full potential.
 - b. How can we control the problems of life and bring love, peace, and joy to ourselves, our loved ones and the world?
3. To be barren or unfruitful, means to be vain, empty, and useless.
 - a. We see that it is opposite to a tree that is planted by a river of water, and is green, flourishing and fruitful.
 - b. And so, what I want to look at this morning is how God speaks through Jeremiah about fruitlessness and how he gives mankind the most solemn warnings we will find anywhere in Scripture.

DISCUSSION:

- I. FRUITLESSNESS IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD
 - A. In Jer. 11:3, we find the statement, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant."
 1. This is an interesting verse.
 2. It is about King Josiah, in his 18th year of reign, when renovating the temple, that he discovers a copy of the Law of Moses.
 - a. And so, Josiah summoned all the leaders of the nation and all the citizens of Jerusalem to a public session.
 - b. And, he reads the Word of God to them and then afterward, Josiah personally renewed the covenant with God.
 3. He committed himself to following the Lord and to keep His commandments with all his heart.
 - a. And then, he called upon the people to commit themselves to the Lord.
 - b. Well of course, the people responded to the challenge by dedicating themselves to keeping the covenant of God's Holy

Word.

- (1) They promised to obey the Lord and to keep His commandments.
- (2) However, the people soon broke their promise.
 - (a) And for that reason, the Lord spoke to Jeremiah, instructing the prophet to review His covenant with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

- B. You know, today, there are many who find themselves in a similar situation.
1. God makes the demand to obey His commands by which he gives them a relationship with him and that they will have the wonderful hope of the promised land that flows with milk and honey, the promise land of heaven.
 2. But sadly, few people ever listen to the warnings of the Lord.
 - a. Most disobey His commandments and followed their own selfish, evil desires.
 - b. They live lives of lust, greed, covetous, idolatry and unrighteousness.
 3. Now, in the eyes of many, the tragic sufferings of people and nations are simply due to the common mishaps of human life and missteps of leaders.
 - a. But the truth is that sin and evil cause the tragedies that happen to people and nations.
 - b. God's hand of judgment falls so that wicked people will turn to Him, cry out for His mercy and help, and draw close to Him.
 - (1) This had been the case with Israel down through the centuries here in Jeremiah.
 - (2) But despite God's warning of the curse of judgment, as Israel was given, back in Jer. 11:3, the people had continued to ignore and rebel against Him, rejecting His commandments and fulfilling the lusts of their flesh.
 - (a) Therefore God's hand of judgment fell, and the people suffered all the curses of the covenant, just as His Word had warned.
- C. This shows us that it is simply not enough to have a mental belief in the Lord.
1. We must have a heart belief that is so committed to the Lord that it stirs us to follow and obey Him.
 2. Because, hearts that belong to the Lord, leads us to live sober, righteous, and godly lives, looking for the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).
 3. I mean, just listen to what God's Holy Word says about obeying the Lord:
 - a. In Matt. 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful

works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

- b. In Matt. 7:24-27, Jesus continues by saying, “whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”
 - (1) If we do not stand on the rock of Christ, we will fall.
 - (2) We will be as Jeremiah said to Israel, “Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant.”

- D. You know, a similar situation is found in 1 Samuel 15:10–23.
 - 1. It concerns King Saul, who was commanded to smite the Amalekites.
 - a. But, he chose his own terms of obedience and saved Agag the king and the best of the cattle.
 - b. The prophet Samuel walked into that situation and heard the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle.
 - c. And, Samuel promptly rebuked King Saul with these solemn words: “You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you” (1 Sam. 15:26).
 - 2. There is no substitute for total obedience to the word of God and if we will not follow it, we are fruitless.

II. FRUITLESSNESS IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF NOT TRUSTING THE POWER OF GOD

- A. In Jeremiah 17, we have dramatic and devastating words addressed to God’s people, who of all the nations of the earth, had seen the mighty demonstrations of God’s power.
 - 1. Yet they had turned from Jehovah God and sought alliances with Egypt and Assyria.
 - 2. God’s prophet had to come and said in Jer. 17:5, “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.”
 - a. You know, Moses had this problem.
 - (1) Remember, he thought that “by his hand” he could deliver Israel (Acts 7:25).
 - (2) He smote an Egyptian, ran into the desert, and for forty years God had to show him that Moses could not trust in his own hand.
 - (3) Only after those forty years of utter brokenness could God

take a man who was afraid to even open his mouth and use him to deliver His people from slavery in Egypt.

3. You know, the human heart is often guilty of trusting man instead of God.
 - a. With Judah, they trusted the arm of the flesh, that is, their own wisdom and power, to deliver them from their enemies.
 - b. But they, like any people who place their trust in man's power and wisdom, would be utterly disappointed and eventually cursed.
 - (1) Most forget that all power ultimately belongs to the Lord.
- B. Now, back in Jer. 17:6, the scripture shows that because they trusted in man, they would be like scrawny bushes in the desert that had no hope of recovery and would live in a barren, empty desert made up of salt, a place where no one could exist.
1. When we think of ourselves, how can we possibly be barren or fruitless when we put our fate in the knowledge and abilities of men, with all their sciences which has produced so many medical and technological advances for the human race?
 2. Well, science is limited.
 - a. Man will never prevent some of the tragedies of human life.
 - b. Accidents caused by human misjudgment and miscalculation will always happen because of man's imperfection and frailties.
 - (1) Furthermore, much of human life can never be controlled by the wisdom and power of man alone.
 - c. Science cannot prevent aging or death, much less solve the problems of the lustful human flesh, the corruption which man puts in his heart, and the sinful attitudes of mankind.
 3. Therefore, people who trust only in what man can do will be cursed.
 - a. They will live like Judah, in a wasteland, missing out on God's blessings and His gift of eternal life.
 - (1) Paul said, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).
 - (2) Thus, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool . . ." (Prov. 28:26).
- C. Now, people who trust the Lord, they are given wonderful promises as recorded for us in Jer. 17:7-8.
1. They will be blessed and their hope in the Lord will be rewarded.
 2. They will be nourished by God and firmly rooted in life, like a tree planted by water that grows deep roots, enabling it to withstand any storm that sweeps across the land.
 3. They will not fear when the blazing trials of life come, but instead they will conquer them all (v.8).
 4. They will never fail to produce fruit, for they will be like a tree by the water that always has the nourishment it needs to produce fruit, even in a drought (v.8).

- D. Thus, people who place their trust in the Lord will be able to withstand all the trials, temptations, hardships, and misfortunes of life.
1. For Jesus said in Jn. 10:28, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand."
 2. Our God shall supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19).
 3. For, the LORD is our light and our salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD *is* the strength of our life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psa. 27:1).
- E. Therefore, we must trust in the power of God and stop trusting in man.

III. FRUITLESSNESS IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF DECEITFULNESS IN DOING THE WORK OF GOD

- A. In Jer. 48, we learn that judgment was coming upon Moab because of the people's materialism and idolatry.
1. Moab should have believed in the Lord and listened to His Word given by Jeremiah.
 2. But they had rejected the Lord, they embraced materialism by trusting in their own works and in their own treasures and in their own worship of false gods which is why judgment was coming (vs. 7).
 3. Babylon was coming, as God's hand of judgment, to destroy the nation of Moab (vs. 1-3).
 - a. And, the people of Moab would suffer bitterly (vs.4-6).
 - (1) Children would cry out, horrified at the slaughter and frightened out of their minds.
 - (2) Refugees would suffer deep anguish, weeping bitterly, as they flee in utter confusion running here and there, not knowing where to flee (v.5).
 - (3) Some would run and hide in the desert, trying to make themselves as inconspicuous as a bush (v.6).
 - b. And so, as a result of the people's sins, the nation of Moab would be ruined (vs.8-10).
 - (1) Not a town would escape destruction.
 - (2) The cities would be so devastated that it would be as though salt had been spread over all the ground to prevent any growth whatsoever.
 - (3) No longer would anyone live in the cities (v.9).
 - (a) The nation was doomed because of its horrible sin.
- B. Now, we come to Jer. 48:10, it states, "Cursed *be* he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed *be* he that keepeth back his sword from blood."
1. Babylon's army was to do the will of God.
 2. Now, if they became lax, that is slacking or lazy in their carrying out of this work of judgment, if their sword does not draw blood, then they themselves will fall under the curse, which in this case, it means that they would have the sword wielded against them.

3. You see, negligence from those who work for God is tragic beyond imagination.
- C. Likewise, this can also be a warning to us against doing the work of the Lord negligently, and failing to declare all the counsel of God, no matter how unpopular it might be.
1. If you pretend to do the work of the Lord, if you make a show of serving God's glory, but you are really serving your own ends and are not carrying out the work of the Lord, you deceive yourself.
 - a. God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7).
 2. And, we have been told what to do for all divine work and service; every man has work to do for God.
 - a. And, all should be done in uprightness and sincerity, with all faithfulness and integrity.
 - b. But, if it is done deceitfully when men play the hypocrite and are negligent, when they are backward being lukewarm, when they are infrequent just doing the work of the Lord sporadically, it brings upon them, as Jeremiah pointed out, a curse of God's wrath upon them.
- D. A great example of this is found with the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11).
1. The text shows that there is nothing God hates more than deceitfulness in the work of the Lord.
 - a. As you know, Ananias and Sapphira were members of the Jerusalem church, and they had seen Barnabas come with all his wealth and lay it all at the apostles' feet.
 - b. Ananias and Sapphira decided that they too wanted to make a good impression on the leaders of the church, so they sold some land and gave part of the proceeds to the apostles while pretending to give it all.
 2. They lied and when they presented their gift to the apostles, Peter, seeing through the fraud and phoniness of it all, he said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3).
 - a. Immediately, Ananias and then Sapphira were smitten by the judgment of God.
 - b. This illustrates the truth that God will not look with favor upon deceitfulness in the work of the Lord.
- E. Thus, fruitlessness is seen when we do nothing for the Lord.

CONCLUSION

1. You know, when any covenant or agreement is broken, the consequences are usually very

- disturbing and sometimes catastrophic.
- a. Breaking an agreement leads to a loss of trust between the parties, whether between individuals or nations.
 - b. And, a failure to keep a covenant can cause such tragedies as divorce, loss of employment, loss of a home, loss of friendships, loss of life.
2. Now, when God and His people had made a covenant, an agreement with each other, God expected that covenant to not be broken.
- a. Likewise as Christians, he expects you to bring your hearts into submission to God's Word.
 - b. As a Christian, he expects you to bring your life into submission to God's will.
3. When we ask ourselves how can one keep from falling in life, from failing, from coming up short?
- a. Well, it is by being fruitful in the ways of God.
 - i. By not obeying man, but obeying the word of God.
 - ii. By not trusting man, but trusting in the power of God to overcome.
 - iii. By not doing the work of the Lord deceitfully or a lack of diligence, but giving your best to God.
4. So, have you given your life to God and are you fruitful?
- a. Don't be as Judah who trusted in and obeyed the voices of men.
 - b. Look to God and put your trust in him before it is too late and the wrath of God comes down upon you.