

July 31

Jeremiah 15-17

In today's reading we will get a picture of the personal feelings of Jeremiah, and also some instructions from the Lord for his personal way of life.

The first part of the reading gives us the picture of a very discouraged prophet. He is so depressed that he wishes he had never been born. Although it was a delight for him to hear that direct message from God, the results have been only rejection, sorrow, and alienation for Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, when we as his children hear his voice, it brings sweet delight to our souls. For me, it's when his word fits directly into my life situations to give me encouragement, instruction, guidance, and praise. Jeremiah experienced that exhilarating power and presence of the Lord as he spoke, but he complained that instead of blessing he received curses from all around.

On the heels of Jeremiah's complaint, God corrects him, telling Jeremiah to repent. The Lord made it clear that he cannot use a complainer, and reminds him of the promises he had given him earlier. He would be like a bronze wall that could not be overcome.

The next instruction for Jeremiah is that he is not to marry. He is told that in the near future, the invading armies will come and slaughter families in the street to the extent that there would be no opportunity to mourn or even bury them. In this way the Lord was both using Jeremiah as an example and sparing him from great loss.

Jeremiah is also instructed not to go to funerals. In the days to come there will be so much death and destruction in the city that there will be no time to mourn. God instructs him instead to be faithful and to continue to proclaim his message.

In the midst of these dark pronouncements we have messages of hope. To this point in the history of the Israelites, the greatest deliverance was thought to have been from Egypt, the place of bondage. Now the Lord says the restoration of Israel from the captivity of this coming invader from the north will be the rescue remembered. The Lord will bring them back! It will seem like a miracle. We will see all this fulfilled when we read the stories in Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

At the end of chapter 16 is a song of triumph, proclaiming that through all these circumstances the nations will come to see that idols are nothing, and only the Lord himself is God. Even in the Lord's discipline of his people we see his heart for the nations.

Chapter 17 begins with a picture of the heart condition of Judah. Their hearts are hard and engraved with sin. Even their children are deeply indoctrinated into false worship. In Deuteronomy parents were instructed to impress the Lord's words and commands upon their children. Now the children's minds were only impressed with the visions of Asherah poles.

The next idolatry the Lord attacks is trust placed in man. To turn away from God and rely on man is likened to being a lonesome bush in the middle of a desert. In contrast, those who trust in the Lord are like a tree planted by a stream. I'm sure Jeremiah was thinking of David's Psalm 1 as he wrote these words.

Calvin said "our hearts are idol making factories". If we do not worship the true God we will find worship elsewhere. We were created for worship. That sinful nature that has so twisted man's worship causes the Lord to finally declare, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

In the last portion of our reading (17:12-18) Jeremiah has come to grips with his feelings and asks for healing even as he gives praise to God. It's as though he's saying "your will, not mine!"

Today we make you alone the object of our worship, Lord God.