

Trust in the Lord

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All this past week, I have been considering the words of testimony that we heard last week from Fr. Kramer, as I'm sure you all have as well. If you have yet to hear what he and his wife said you can go to YouTube and search St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church and click on the video. When I think about what he said, words come to mind such as 'amazing,' 'inspiring,' 'praise God!' And I ask questions such as, 'How can God use us to bring about similar results here in the United States?' Or, more appropriately, 'How can I follow and obey Jesus Christ each and every day as they do?' As Fr. Kramer said, if we love Christ, we will obey Him.

Obedience to the Lord is paramount. In fact, if we are to bear fruit for the Kingdom, if we are to be blessed, we have to be obedient to the Lord. And it has always been this way. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)." He is the same in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament, as He is today, as He always will be. He does not change. And in a world that seems to change constantly, that is good news.

There is one more question that I asked this past week when I pondered what we heard last weekend. That question is, "How can I consistently obey what the Lord teaches us from His Word. Let's think about that while looking at today's Old Testament reading from Jeremiah 17:5-10.

Beginning with verse 5, "Thus says the LORD, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD.⁶ For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant.'" "A bush in the desert" doesn't refer to a cactus or other succulent. This refers to a bush with green leaves that should be in a wetter area. Perhaps like a boxwood that we might find in a front yard around here. In the desert it won't last, it will dry up and waste away. "Stony wastes in the wilderness," again, no life. "A land of salt without inhabitant;" in Western New York we know that salt eats away at everything. It eats away at metal, stone, everything. And nothing grows in salt. Think of the dead sea. It is so salty that no life is in it. The result of turning away from the Lord is ultimately death.

Scripture is very clear on this point. Turning away from the Lord is sin. And "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). This is where we all used to be, once upon a time, before we knew the Lord. The challenge for us, especially here in the United States, is not to trust in mankind or in the things of mankind or in the world. And we are a nation of such affluence it can be difficult not to trust in what we have as citizens of the United States. Yet that is what we are called to do as followers of Christ. We can forget that our primary citizenship is in Heaven. Therefore, our trust should be in the King, Jesus Christ, and not in the U.S. or in mankind.

Contrast verses 5 and 6 with verses 7 and 8, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. ⁸" "For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will

not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.” What a difference! A tree planted by the water has an ample supply of nutrients and water even during a dry season. When we trust in the Lord, we can not only survive a dry season in our lives, but we can thrive in it. Why? Because we have an ample supply of nutrients and water just like that tree that is planted by a stream. We will have life! Yes, there is a drought. But the Lord is supplying all our needs. We need only to continue to trust in Him, and not in mankind.

In every situation we are presented with these two options. Either trust in the Lord, or trust in mankind which includes us. Life or death. The Lord presented those two options to Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 30:19-20,

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

We see that same choice here in Jeremiah 17. God is reminding the people of what He said to their ancestors in the wilderness. And it is important for us to know also because it is consistent in Scripture, it appears more than once, so we know that it is important to remember.

In fact, it appears twice in our readings for today. Notice in Psalm 1 that this same choice is there also. Even with similar imagery. “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree firmly planted” which means that such a person is steadfast, resolute, certain. “He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.” Same thing we just read in Jeremiah. Prospering and not withering.

Verse 4, “⁴ The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶ For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Again, death is the result of turning away from God. That is the choice, either death or life.

We all made this choice initially when we decided to follow Jesus. Before following Christ we trusted in mankind and in ourselves. We were the king of our own heart. But when we decided to follow Jesus, we stopped trusting in mankind. We stopped trusting in ourselves. We made the choice to trust in Jesus and to submit ourselves to Him alone.

However, this choice goes beyond just deciding to follow Jesus. This is a choice that we are presented with each and every day. In Deuteronomy we see this choice presented to the people of Israel. These were God’s people, and yet this choice is still present for them. The same is true for us. And whether in small matters or in large matters the choice we ought to make is to trust in the Lord with **all** our heart. As Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the LORD with

all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

For example, do we trust in the Lord when it comes to our finances? Do we trust in the Lord when it comes to our careers? Do we trust in the Lord when it comes to time? Do we trust in the Lord when it comes to our relationships?

So, for example, I prayed for months before I started dating my wife. Some of that was because she really didn't like me. In her words I was an “ewww, yuck, icky boy.” But she knew God wanted her to marry me so here we are now almost 21 years and 6 children later. I had to be patient and trust in the Lord, that He knew what was best, and she had to trust in the Lord also. We both had to submit our hearts to God. And the result is life!

This does not mean that we are not to seek counsel at all. But it depends on whom we are seeking counsel from. Psalm 1:1 states, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!” We don't seek counsel from the wicked. We seek counsel from those who are godly. Whom we know love the Lord and have our best interests at heart. Those people that will speak life and not death. People that we know will trust in the Lord for us and with us. And we take that counsel and submit it to the Lord. The Lord will tell us how to proceed. And we show our trust in Him by obeying what He says.

Verse 9, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” Verse 10, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.” Why is this included here? Because it highlights the fact that we need to trust in the Lord rather than in what our heart tells us. God understands our heart. God knows what is in our mind.

We all have this constant battle with the flesh. Our flesh always wants to lead us to do our own thing apart from God. But our heart, soul, strength, and mind need to be trained to trust in the Lord and do what He says. And this is accomplished over time through diligent Bible study, prayer, and practice in every situation.

So often I hear people say things like, “My heart is telling me to do this.” That's great, but how does it measure up to what God says? Is what your heart is telling you consistent with Scripture? Are you willing to submit your heart to the Lord and trust Him completely? God rewards according to our obedience. And He can be trusted!

Fr. Kramer mentioned discovery Bible studies. This is where you sit down together, you read the Scripture passage, and you learn what it says and how to apply it. And you typically answer four questions. What does this passage say about God? What does this passage say about human beings? What is the obedience point? What is one thing I can share? And then you hold each other accountable. I've just shared with you the answer to all four of those questions. I'll recap for the sake of clarity.

What does this passage say about God? God is loving and seeks our good. He is trustworthy and true. He is a total gentleman and does not force us to choose one way or the other but offers us the freedom to choose for ourselves. He seeks to reward us with life.

What does this passage say about human beings? We have a propensity to choose the wrong way and so sin. We are often short-sighted and choose what we want for today rather than considering the long-term effects of our choice. We are, as the hymn states, “prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love.”

What is the obedience point? Trust in the Lord with all our heart rather than trusting in mankind and even in our own understanding. Submit all counsel to Him. Seek His will in everything.

What is one thing I can share? This is my testimony of the truth of God’s word. I had to trust in the Lord regarding my wife. And she had to trust in the Lord regarding me. And we did. And the result has been life. We will be celebrating our 21st anniversary this June, and we’ve had 6 children. Trust in the Lord and bear fruit. I can tell you about girls I dated that I shouldn’t have too. Believe me, I’ve made plenty of mistakes where I didn’t trust in God in this. But marrying my wife I got right.

I’m sure you all can think of times where you trusted in the Lord and got it right. That’s your testimony of the goodness of God and the truth of His word. Share it! And continue to trust in the Lord with all your heart in everything. Be part of a small group. Hold each other accountable. Choose life each and every day. Be the body of Christ. Go and make disciples that do likewise.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!