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SERMON TITLE: **Hard Questions, Life's Choices**
The Life & Times of Jeremiah
SCRIPTURE: **Jeremiah 5:11-17, 17:5-10**
DATE: **September 29, 2019**
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Romans 1:17-22

Counting every blessing the choir sings. Here are the blessings:

- ~ Blindness to sight in color
- ~ From death to living forever
- ~ Having failed but meeting a redeemer
- ~ This is being blessed beyond all measure

Are you counting every blessing today?

- ~ I was lost, now I'm found by the Father
- ~ I've been changed from a ruin to treasure
- ~ I've been given a hope and a future
- ~ I've been blessed beyond all measure¹

The Psalmist wrote: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (1:1-2).

You would think Israel would feel blessed. You would think they would walk in the Word. You would expect that they would count every blessing because God is so good. God is their source, yet their minds are elsewhere. Hear the story:

"The people of Israel and Judah are full of treachery against me," says the LORD. "They have lied about the LORD and said, 'He won't bother us! No disasters will come upon us. There will be no war or famine. God's prophets are all windbags who don't really speak for him. Let their predictions of disaster fall on themselves!'" (Jeremiah 5:11-13)

God is upset. God has had it. God, as a result of their betrayal will take action:

Therefore, this is what the LORD God of Heaven's Armies says: "Because the people are talking like this, my messages will flame out of your mouth and burn the people like kindling wood. O Israel, I will bring a distant nation against you," says the LORD. . . . Their weapons are deadly; their warriors are mighty. They will devour the food of your harvest; they will devour your sons and

daughters. They will devour your flocks and herds; they will devour your grapes and figs. And they will destroy your fortified towns, which you think are so safe." (v. 14-17)

God's messages are going to get very direct. Since faith is being denied, God's protections will get lowered. They will live with the reality of putting their trust in themselves.

Life's choices.

God is asking hard questions. Sometimes we find ourselves in a dilemma or a problem and we need to ask the hard questions. As we look at their hard questions, it will help us direct our attention to our own.

God chose these people and set them apart—God consecrated them as God's special possession. God had something important for them to do; a special place in God's plan to represent God in a world that sorely needs God. And yet they have broken the covenant. They have compromised the relationship with God, and in fact, abandoned God as their God. They prefer to make up their own gods. They prefer to put themselves first.

They doubt God will notice: "he won't bother us; no disasters, famines, or wars will come—his prophets are full of hot air." (v. 12-13)

One hard question to ask is *what are God's people teaching their children about how to live out their faith if they don't think God will notice them?*

So perhaps that's a question we must ask. What am I teaching others about how to live by faith?

- How much do I seek God as a solution for things that happen to me?
- How central is God in the responses I make?
- If I say I want to live in relationship with the Lord, how do my actions support that goal?

Where does God stand in your life?

Jeremiah 17:5-6 says this: (Remember now, God's words are going to be harsh.)

"Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6Y91axwxfI>, accessed September 27, 2019.

from the LORD. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land.”

That’s pretty barren! Do you see why? Jeremiah says that’s the result of beginning with the wrong person—yourself!

Eugene Peterson in *Run with the Horses* explains it like this: “Before it ever crossed our minds that God might be important, God singled us out as important. . . . We are known before we know. . . . The fundamental mistake is to begin with ourselves and not God. God is the center from which all life develops.” (p. 39)

The other night our family went to the Rangers baseball game together. We go because we are fans. We were in the upper deck, sitting behind three friendly guys. My granddaughter has about the biggest voice of any 12-year-old I’ve ever heard. She can break an eardrum! She was cheering away. These men were congratulating her. The game was close. People started doing the wave. We were loud! The audience was exuberant, cheering them on, doing the wave with gusto as it came around to our section. . . .

But the next section after us let an entire upper deck section of waves die. They did not raise their arms; they did not rise from their seats; they did not cheer their team. They sat like blocks of wood barely even noticing that a game was going on, like Israel barely noticed God was around.

One of the young men in front of us stood up and yelled toward their section, “WAKE UP PEOPLE!” The sign on the game board flashed “MAKE NOISE! LOUDER!” The other section did nothing but stare straight ahead and yawn. So you know what people did? We started the wave the other way around and passed them up. We left them out, just like God left out unresponsive Israel.

Do you participate in the faith with great enthusiasm? Those poor people in the next section were stunted fans in a desert of indifference, a wilderness of inactivity.

Do you notice what God is doing in the world? It can be exciting. It can build your faith. According to Peterson, God is “saving; he is rescuing; he is blessing; he is providing; he is judging; he is healing; he is enlightening.” (p. 41)

It can lift your depression if you see God in others.

The choir sang this about participating in the LORD:

*I am counting every blessing, counting every blessing
Letting go and trusting when I cannot see
I am counting every blessing, counting every blessing
Surely every season you are good to me*

Let’s read on:

But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit. “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve” (Jeremiah 17:7-10).

Jeremiah’s life did not begin with himself. He came as one who had confidence that God knew him; that God had a purpose for his life. Are you taking the time to see what God might have in mind for you? God always has an identity in mind for you because God knows you.

Let’s watch this video of a woman who has discovered this secret.²

This 96-year-old choir director was Brittany’s teacher (Brittany is our accompanist). Brittany says, “She is the reason I got a piano audition to get a music scholarship at Baylor University. Without her, I wouldn’t be where I am! She was in her 70s/80s when she taught me.”

The Christian life is not for spectators. We live in a troubled world with many challenges. We have personal challenges, personal goals, personal hopes. The hard question is, *How are we approaching them?* Leaning on God? Being guided by God? Looking to God to bring us through in victory?

Would you rather rely on you? Eugene Peterson says, Jeremiah was “enlisted on God’s side in this war.” He didn’t really look around to decide should I trust God or do what I want? “He was already chosen—and so are we all. . . . We either take up the life to which we have been consecrated or we traitorously defect from it.”

Today we ask the hard questions. We do struggle with these things; but God cares. He searches our hearts and with a positive answer to life’s choices, you will be blessed.

*You’re my strength, my hope for tomorrow
I’ve been blessed beyond all measure
Oh, you are good to me
Oh, you are good to me*

AMEN

² https://www.kwtx.com/templates/2015_Sub_Video_Share?contentObj=561083501, accessed September 24, 2019.