**Jeremiah 17:5-10**

**5Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.6They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. 8They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. 9The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it? 10I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.**

**Luke 6:17-26**

**17He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.**

**20Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22“Blessed are you *when* people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23Rejoice *in that day* and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. 24“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. 26“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.**

**Blessings and curses.**

**Why do we come here? You might be asking that question right now. Why did I get out of bed and make the effort to be here today? You probably didn’t come here to receive a verbal beating.**

**We are here to worship the one God who is worthy of our lives, our praise. To worship means to bow before/ bend the knee in surrender. I know over and over again what it means to be at that point where you have come to the end of yourself in worship and to stand or sit, in complete surrender.**

**It is in that place where we come as, open, empty vessels, that the Lord can work in us to shape us in his image. Today, we look at some warnings which Jesus made, which have their origin in the Old Testament prophets; like what was read today in Jeremiah. In worship, as we come bowed in surrender to the Lord, we get to reflect on whether in our lives, the ladder we are climbing is leaning up against the right wall. Today we ask ourselves: are we walking down the right road, or have we drifted off track?**

**We read how power flowed through Jesus, to heal many in the crowd, but when Jesus spoke, he focussed directly on his disciples. His warnings are disturbing for us. It is especially disturbing for you and I who live with wealth. Maybe you heard the readings and were wondering if you could slip out and not come back until next week? We need to let the power of scripture percolate deeplpy into our lives.**

**In Matthew we have the beatitudes (or blessings) delivered within the Sermon on the Mount. Here Luke includes his beatitudes in a sermon on the plain. The Beatitudes which Luke chooses to use are harder hitting and bluntly challenging. Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the kingdom of God – ouch!**

**How do we understand this piece?**

**A context to keep in mind here is that the first receivers of the book of Luke would have lived a generation or so after Jesus; late first century and into the second century. Luke wrote to a mainly gentile community of believers.**

**Why is this relevant to mention? Because within the early church, there were periods of violent persecution. Certainly there was widespread suspicion and prejudice against believers. People valued what was old and established, but Christianity was a new belief system. Also, people valued stability and so those who said ‘Jesus is Lord’ instead of ‘Caesar is Lord’ were committing a destabilizing act of rebellion. In that context they would have heard Jesus words of encouragement – blessed are the poor… If their businesses had taken a turn for the worse because people did not trade with them because they were un-patriotic believers in a new faith which no one understood, then they would have related to Blesse are the poor. Also we know the early church had offerings for the poor, and they supported travelling evangelists as well – all this eats into one’s basic wealth.**

**Certainly too, people were tempted to drift from faith in Christ when life got tough and persecution arose. This was a constant question for the early church. What do we do with those who fall away in hard times then come back when its easier going?**

**So, within a time of persecution, the faithful might be poor, and hungry. They might have every reason to weep if a fellow believer had been taken to prison – often that was a leader of their local fellowship. This helps us to understand the fourth beatitude - 22“Blessed are you *when* people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23Rejoice *in that day* and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.**

**The true prophets were rejected because they spoke the word of the Lord whether it was a popular message or not. There were manty false Prophets who only said what the people wanted to hear.**

**Jeremiah was a typical prophet who warned the people that they had gone astray.**

**Jeremiah’ life was threatened, he was arrested, imprisoned, thrown down a well which had no water in it, but wet mud and so he sank down into it. He was narrowly rescued from that and then had to flee with a group of faithful people to Egypt.**

**Just like the prophets, the early believers were ‘hated’, ‘excluded’, ‘reviled’ and ‘defamed’. Jesus said: ‘rejoice’ – celebrate – ‘leap for joy even’, because your reward is great in heaven. This text can be seen then as an encouragement to be faithful when opposition comes your way and when following Jesus leaves you disadvantaged and even hated.**

**Even so we are not to lessen the words of Jesus in their power and challenge to us. Many would say that basically we want to be, wealthy, satisfied, happy, and to have a good name. These are the things which Jesus says if we have them we are destined for woes: miseries, despair.**

**Let’s look at how Jeremiah’s prophecy illuminates Jesus’ words. Again, without stripping the basic words of their power and challenge, looking at what Jeremiah said we can shed some light on what’s going on in scripture, especially regarding the rich.**

**5Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.**

**When we seek after wealth and happiness, satisfaction and a good name as the highest priorities, the real danger is that we place our trust in others, ourselves and our own strength. The result is so easily that our hearts turn away from the Lord.**

**Look at our country, our city. There are many people who are well off, people with a good name, but who have no regard for God or God’s ways. If I can speak to parents and grandparents even great grandparents for a moment. Its all very well wanting our children to have a good education, a good job, a house in a nice suburb in Howick. This is the overwhelming cultural drive for many people, but i remind you, of Jesus words, what does it profit anyone to gain the whole world but lose your soul?**

**Today, bowing the knee to Caesar – the economic and cultural powers which hold sway – is normal. To choose to follow a different path, one which lives by the power of the Kingdom of Heaven, can be looked down on with some suspicion and prejudice.**

**But instead of trusting in others, in your own abilities and having a heart which is turned away from the Lord, the person who is truly blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord above all else.**

**There are a good number of scriptures which are more positive about wealth. Prosperity is seen as a by-product of honouring the Lord. In Psalm 1 which Jeremiah echoes, the person who trusts in the Lord, meditating on his word and living it:**

**3That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
    which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
    whatever they do prospers.**

**So The Bible is not anti wealth and happiness per se, what it challenges is a life which says we have no need for God.**

**God is concerned with the state of our hearts, with our motives. Jeremiah concludes: ‘our hearts are devious’, we don’t know ourselves totally; our lives are examined by the Lord who looks on the heart. But what is visible to all are our deeds. Good deeds flow from a good heart, the proof of our trust in the Lord will be seen by our lives. Our actions bear witness to our faith.**

**If we are rich, and full, and laughing, and everyone speaks well of us (which could have been the rich in the Roman Empire), but have no trust in the Lord, then we have had our fill already, the things which have so eagerly been sought, like a full belly and laughter, might turn sour when we realise that our life’s climb has been set against the wrong wall, or that we have walked down the wrong path all of our lives.**

**We’re challenged here to consider what we bow our knee to in reality? Is it wealth, comfort, happiness and a good name, or is our first priority to serve the Lord regardless of its consequences?**

**Prayer of response.**