

Scripture Readings and Sermon

September 22, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This lament comes at the end of a vision that begins in Chapter 7 with a call for repentance. The call for repentance, however, is only four sentences (verses 2-7). The vision then goes into the reason for the judgment and a description of the after effects of judgment. This is why Jeremiah says that the harvest is past and the summer is ended. The harvest referring to all the opportunities that God waited for the people to do good and the summer referring to the opportunity to repent. They neither did what was good in the sight of the Lord nor did they repent of their evil and so they are "not saved". In response to this vision that included the "bones" of the people after judgment (8:1-3), Jeremiah cries out in grief and pain. Even though the pain was a result of their own actions, Jeremiah can not stand to witness their agony and suffering. Christians would later argue that it was only when Jesus came that the balm was given and the suffering ended.

Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:1-7 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The letter to Timothy has been dated by some authors at 65 A.D. just before Paul's death. This places the letter one year before the start of the Jewish rebellion against Rome and one year after the Great Fire of Rome which Nero blamed on the Christians. This may be the reason why Paul specifically mentions praying for "kings and all who are in high positions". Paul was most likely witnessing the execution of Christians by fire and wanting stability to return to Rome. Paul also probably does not want to see the church pulled into the Jewish rebellion. The first reason is that Jesus himself resisted those who wanted him to lead a rebellion. The second reason is, like Jesus, Paul was focused on the coming Kingdom of God which would replace all earthly kingdoms. Finally, Paul wishes to focus Timothy's attention on prayer above all else. It is in prayer that Timothy will discern God's will. Prayer does not simply mean lifting up our supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings to God but also actively listening to how God wants us to respond. Prayers may lead to sense of peace or it may prompt us to actions. The more people pray, the more they will "come the knowledge of the truth" by encountering Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Commentary on Luke 16:1-15 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This lesson comes immediately after the parable of the prodigal son upon which this story is built. In the parable of the prodigal son, the son valued his father's wealth more than his relationship with his father. The wealth, however, proved fleeting while the father's love remained constant and ended up his salvation. The older son at the end of the story, however, equates love with money saying, "you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends"(15:29). Equating love with money or valuing money over relationship both are a form of idol worship. Since money or wealth viewed this way is a false god, then wealth is dishonest, unrighteous, or evil. This is the context of the "dishonest manager". Everyone who place "wealth" which can be measured in money, power, prestige, and self-importance, as their number one priority are dishonest since a relationship with God is the source of true wealth. While Jesus points out that at least the dishonest manager is a loyal servant to his true master, money, that master is still dishonest and an abomination to God. Does this mean that money or wealth is bad? When it becomes an idol of worship, the focus of our time and thoughts, then yes! Real wealth is our relationship with God.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

In the gospel today, Jesus warns us that we can only serve one master. If our hearts crave wealth, then there is no room for God. He may of been looking at the disciples when he taught but he

was speaking to the Pharisees and all those in positions of wealth. Paul reminds us that wealth is not limited to money but is also found in perceived power and social influence. For this reason, we should especially pray for our rulers since they must live in the midst of temptation. If they give into this temptation and lead others to follow wealth over God, then the fall the Jeremiah lamented will come. They will cry to their gods of wealth and power, "Is there no balm and Gilead" and find that their false gods have abandoned them.

Stepping into the world, I wanted to make a difference so I sought out true power. I studied politics and law as an undergraduate. After peeling away the layers, however, I found that money is the rudder that steers political power. I then learned how to worship money and wealth at a school of business and learned the ins and outs of accounting, economics, and management. I put on the suit of "power" and entered the business world only to find that, while the goal and motivator was money, it was communication that greased the wheels of an organization. In the field of computers, I saw how quickly a business could grind to a halt with the lines of communication broke down. There was both wealth and power to be found in being the one who could wield the mystical knowledge of computers. Despite all of this, however, I found that my heart felt empty and poor. The flesh pots of Egypt were delicious but I was still a slave to Pharaoh.

It was only when I turned my attention and my heart to pursuing God that I began to understand true wealth. What I had considered emblems of power and wealth in hindsight were simply chains that pulled my soul down. The more I had, the more I needed to maintain what I had. The cage was gilded and seem to have a lot of perks but it was still a cage. I soon found that I desired the perks in order to escape the emptiness. With God as my wealth, however, the perks soon became like nice trinkets which were attractive on occasion but no substitute for the real beauty underneath.

The more I turned to God, however, the stronger the criticism I received from those who still pursued wealth. They viewed my life as simple and some how impoverished because I did need to spend a lot of money escaping my daily life. Time spent with my children instead of all the traveling I did to grow my wealth has meant more to me than any European vacation or piece of sporting equipment. This is not to say that having money as a tool is not at time necessary and more often preferable to the alternative. I believe that God understand our need for money in order to live with a reasonable degree of comfort. I also agree with Paul that a worker is due their wages.

The point of Jesus' parable is not that money is bad but that the worship of wealth is an abomination. Money is a tool to be used for the glory of God and not a substitute for God. Money can not save our soul or protect us in the valley of the shadow of death. No matter how much money we through at trying to avoid death, death will still come and we will still have to face God for how we lived life. There is only one balm in Gilead and there is only one God and mediator for humanity - Jesus Christ our Lord. While memories of the flesh pots of Egypt may look good as we walk through the desert regions of life, I would still rather be free and following Jesus than a slave to the Pharaoh of wealth.