

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Jeremiah 17:5–8**

**Sermon: Opposites**

Again, I have chosen as our text our reading from Jeremiah. Jeremiah has been referred to as the prophet of doom. He demonstrates the results of faithlessness and misguided trust. But he also boldly proclaims God's grace and blessing to those who trust in the Lord.

That opposites attract in marriage and relationships is no real surprise. In other domains of reality, though, opposites sometimes remain just that—opposite. In our text, we see a set of opposites that remain diametrically opposed to each other, one resulting in blessing and the other in judgment. Yet the solution to the problem of misplaced trust ironically occurred by opposites attracting in Christ. Opposites attracted in both the nature and work of Christ so that we will direct our trust to the Lord.

Jeremiah the proclaimer of opposites. He clearly proclaims God's judgement against the faithless. He proclaims God's judgment against misplaced trust in our text.

But, quite the opposite, he is also a bold proclaimer of the new covenant. *“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jeremiah 31:33–34). Jeremiah proclaims blessings for appropriately placed trust.

Our text contains the theme of opposites, themes of trust. We need to ask then, what is the object of our trust? Do we trust in man and flesh, in ourselves? Or do we trust in the Lord? Jeremiah shows the real problem. It lies in the hearts of the people and in us. He contrasts the two ways, the way of unbelief and the way of faith.

Cursed is the person who puts hope for the future in something human, who looks for ultimate security in other human beings. The person referred to in our text parallels the person who thinks they are in charge and can do anything on their own. But as we will hear on Ash Wednesday Man was made from dust and shall return to dust. The end of one who trust in flesh will be empty and fruitless. Jeremiah's depiction of a dessert wasteland and being fruitless was a description familiar with his listeners. To the east of Jerusalem was the Judean wastelands. A little farther was a wasteland in which nothing green lived, the land of salt along the Dead Sea.

A stark contrast to the blessedness of the person who trust the Lord! This person places his hope, his faith, his confidence for all things in the Lord. Jeremiah here uses the figures of Psalm 1, picturing the tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season.

When we trust in ourselves, in man and flesh we are in trouble. Our text tells us, “*cursed is the man who trusts in man,*” like a shrub in the desert without water. Or we can be like the tree planted by a stream of water, living water.

Trusting in the Lord brings connectedness, nourishment, and peace, life. So, we have opposites. Trusting in oneself, in our own sinful flesh brings death and decay while trusting in God brings new life in Christ.

The One joined in opposites is the source of rescue from misplaced trust. Jesus is the promised Messiah. Jesus is the incarnate Christ. That is, he is God made (quite the opposite!) man. And he is Word made (quite the opposite!) flesh.

Our nature trusts in gods quite opposite the Lord. Our text gives admonition against idolatry and, in specific, against trusting in man. We have a natural inclination to be bent in on ourselves and consequently trust only ourselves. We trust in many types of other gods. We trust in money, pleasure, power, human relationships, and so forth. We trust in our own autonomy, a popular god of the twenty-first century.

We seek control of our own choices. We seek control of our own lives. But our autonomy atrophies. We experience gradual loss of control. Our text invites us to direct our trust to the one who is truly in control and who graciously chose us—the Lord.

The object of proper trust is the Lord, who became opposites. Opposites attracted in the Lord. The Word became flesh. *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). God became man. *“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”* (Colossians 2:9). Therefore, the Lord became seeable and knowable in Christ. The Lord is opposite of our sinful nature.

*“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

*But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ"*

(Romans 5:12–17).

Our nature through Adam is defined by sin and death. Our nature in Christ is defined by his righteousness and life. The Lord became opposite for our sake. *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Lord became sin for us. God's purpose is that we be declared righteous for the sake of Jesus.

We, then, have become opposites who trust in this Lord of opposites. Opposites attract in us; we are at the same time saint and sinner. We are declared righteous for the sake of the Word made flesh. We still daily struggle against our own flesh. We make daily confession and trust the Lord's opposite word: *Absolution*. By daily contrition and repentance, the old man, our sinful nature, is drowned. By Absolution, the new man, our new nature, daily rises up in the identity and security of Jesus Christ.

Our text sets before us two opposite objects of trust—our own flesh and the Lord. By nature we have all broken the First Commandment and have placed our trust in ourselves. God's grace prevails, though, in that he rescued us in his Son, Jesus Christ. Recognize how all the opposites attracted in Christ to overcome our own opposition to God. In so doing, we can now head in the opposite direction of our natural inclinations and trust in the Lord and abide in his blessings.

Amen