

SEPTEMBER 29, 2019 SUMMARY SERMON

SCRIPTURE LESSON JEREMIAH 32:6-15, I TIMOTHY 6:6-19, LUKE 16:19-31

In case you are wondering why we are spending so much time on Jeremiah it is because everything in the story of Jesus and the New Testament is based on something from the Old Testament. Jesus himself reminds us that that he didn't come to replace the Old Testament but fulfill it. Thus it is important that we deal with large segments and see the Old Testament and the New as two parts of a single work that shouldn't be chopped up into small pieces. Rather we must look how themes play out in the entire Bible and here in the story of Jeremiah we see God at work as an example of love, forgiveness and understanding that in the long run leads to hope.

Jerusalem is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. The situation seems hopeless. Here comes Jeremiah who has been prophesizing the destruction because of the people's unfaithfulness to God. But his message has changed. To understand this text totally we must understand how the legal system worked back then. In the midst of the gloom and destruction Jeremiah is in a bit of a coded way proclaiming a message of hope. He is going through the process of buying a piece of land and establishing a way that will make the deed secure until such time as it can be reclaimed. Putting the deeds in an earthen jar was the equivalent to the locked metal box many of us store our important documents in or a safety deposit box. Except instead of putting them in a closet or under a bed or wherever, the earthen jar was to be buried and in a special place to be found later or put into a cave. In this way Jeremiah is saying that while in the short term the situation seems hopeless, the day will come when Israel will be restored. Too often we get caught up in the short term view, where things may seem difficult. When our Faith should be calling us to put our Faith in God and look to the long term.

In the short term it may seem like Jeremiah is just burying a fair amount of money that he will never get to enjoy in buying land, he will not benefit from. And that, more than likely is true. But that isn't really the point of the story. The point is that in the midst of hopelessness there is hope, if we look beyond the physical world, look beyond the short term to the long term there is hope. This is God's message that Jeremiah is to proclaim.

Both 1 Timothy and the Gospel lesson follow similar themes calling into question the real long term value of money, property and wealth. More important than wealth is maintaining moral standards based on the teachings of God and the example set by Jesus. Yet today it seems in our personal lives, our faith lives and political lives, wealth often is more important than doing things in a moral way. Like the rich man, we seem to believe that some people are meant to serve us, without recognizing we are meant to be servants of each other. Having wealth does not make us more important than other people. But that seems to be an important criteria of our culture today. We put things like schools and churches in a sense up for sale when people use the possibility of withholding donations to get what they want or they become a political football. Often a key factor in this is fear created in the face of potential doom. Compare this to Jeremiah who in the face of certain doom put his faith in God and is willing to invest in the future of the county.

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a story that tells us that the values of this world are not the values of eternity. But probably for many today life eternal is something that they don't worry about so all that matters is their self-centered life of today. The short term life so much a part of our culture that it isn't just the beliefs and values about material things that is affected. Consider our attitudes about the environment. Why should we worry about climate change, when we aren't going to be around to experience the worst effects? Yet we go back to Jeremiah and see him preparing for a future that he probably is not going to benefit from. What would our lives be like if past generations hadn't said, we need to clean up industry so that the air we breathe is safe and the water fit to use? This is as much of a biblically based value then is any issue that we give more time to today in the church. How we use the gifts God has given to us and how that use effects the future, should be something that plays a part in all of our lives. As long as we value wealth and physical things more than serving God we will continue to ignore important biblical values and put the things of this world ahead of serving God.

Christianity is a Faith about the future, where God is trying to lead us into a life that makes the world a better place to live. Too often people who put the things of this world like wealth ahead of serving God have made Christianity into something that holds serving God and making the world a better place to live back. Too often we have indeed turned "But we've always done it this way," into the seven last words of the church and a barrier to serving God for the future that we also are called to serve.