

Blessing or curse – our choice– Sunday November 17th 2013.

Thus says the Lord,

**“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind
And makes flesh his strength,
And whose heart turns away from the Lord.**

**⁶“For he will be like a bush in the desert
And will not see when prosperity comes,
But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness,
A land of salt without inhabitant.**

**⁷“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord
And whose trust is the Lord.**

**⁸“For he will be like a tree planted by the water,
That extends its roots by a stream
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious in a year of drought
Nor cease to yield fruit. (Jeremiah 17:5-8)**

Beloved in the Lord,

There are certain laws that govern life that do not change. For example there is the law of gravity. This is a physical law that does not change and we all know about it. Whether you believe in the law of gravity or not, it exists and it has power over you. You may say, I don't believe in the law of gravity, but your unbelief does not change its existence or power. Jump off a ten story building and attempt to fly and you will find that that your unbelief has not changed the law of gravity.

Many people falsely believe that just because they neither accept or believe God's laws and principles, that they have no power over them. This is just as stupid as denying the law of gravity.

The laws and principles that I would like to speak about today are God's principles regarding blessings and curses. Both blessings and curses are very real. To a great degree, which ones we experience, are determined by the choices that we make. If we willingly submit to God's will and obey Him then we are blessed. If we disobey God, we open ourselves to curses. It is that simple.

Our foundation text today is one of many in God's Word, that talk about this theme. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says:

**“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind
And makes flesh his strength,
And whose heart turns away from the Lord.” (Jer.17:5)**

These are powerful but clearly stated words. They should prompt us to immediately ask ourselves where we place our trust. What do we hope for? What is the source of our strength? Whom do we lean upon? Has our heart been turned away from The Lord? These questions need to be addressed not only personally, but also on the level of our nation.

Today we celebrate Latvia's 95th birthday. The Latvian National Anthem begins with a beautiful prayer asking God to bless Latvia. God promises His blessings upon those who trust in Him. In fact not only He promises His blessing, He commands His blessing. Again I emphasise that this is true of nations as well as individuals.

In our text today we read: **"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord
And whose trust is the Lord.**

**⁸"For he will be like a tree planted by the water,
That extends its roots by a stream
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious in a year of drought
Nor cease to yield fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8)**

Blessing comes upon those who trust in The Lord. Who place their hope in Him. It is really that simple. God has promised it; He has written it in His Word. Do you want to be blessed? Then trust in Him, place your trust fully in Him. I mean fully. A half baked faith is as useless as a half-baked cake, or a half cooked sausage. God rejects half-hearted faith and half-hearted service. Paul writes to the Christians in Rome:

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
(Romans 12:1-2)

This presenting of ourselves to God is not a onetime event, but something we must do continuously. This is not so clear in the English translation, but the Greek is very clear. Continuously present yourselves to God.

This presenting of ourselves is total and complete. The greatest commandment bears it out:

And He said to him, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*** (Matthew 22:37)

You shall love the Lord your God completely, totally. With all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. With how much? All. That's right. There is no room here for a divided heart or divided loyalties. You cannot stand with one foot in the world and the other in God's Kingdom. That is like standing on two boats. You have one foot firmly planted in

each boat and they start to move in opposite directions. You end up in the water. We need to plant both feet firmly in God's boat.

That is what it means to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, a sacrifice that is pleasing to Him. When we do we are blessed. When we trust in Him, then we are in a position to receive His blessing. The first and greatest blessing is that God's forgives us our sin and accepts us into His family as dear children. Through Jesus shed blood, our sins are washed away and our names are written in The Book of Life.

The second great blessing is that Jesus Himself comes and lives in our hearts through God The Holy Spirit. We read in Revelation 3:20: ***"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."*** These words give us a wonderful insight into God's heart. Jesus wants to live in our heart. He wants to commune with us, live in fellowship with us. That is what Jesus means when He says I will dine with him and he with Me. Dining with someone is a great form of fellowship that I am sure we all enjoy.

When we respond to Jesus knocking, and open the door of our hearts to Him, He comes in and lives with us. He fellowships with us. He becomes the best friend we could ever have. He loves us from all His heart. He loves us so much that He experienced Hell, so that we would not have too.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

God so loved us. He invites us, if we haven't as yet, to open the door of our heart to Him. While, and if we don't, we are not able to receive His blessing. We remain under the curse of sin and death, and if we remain outside of Christ, we will be eternally lost.

You see, curses and blessings are eternal. They will continue on after this life. The one who trusts in God with all His heart, is blessed not only here, but throughout eternity. The opposite is also true, the one who does not trust in Christ Jesus here, will spend eternity forever separated with no hope, under the curse of sin – eternal death forever.

The choice is ours. God has done all He needs to from His side. All we need to do is respond positively to Him. The moment we show the slightest interest to trust in Him, He moves Heaven and Earth to help us. He is a God who pursues us in a good sense. He wants us to be saved. He wants us in Heaven, but He does not make us accept His offer.

Jesus said that He is standing at the door and knocking. The one who hears His voice and opens the door, that is the one who is blessed. You see it is not enough to hear. You must also act. You need to open the door and invite Him in. The handle is on your side. Jesus will not kick the door down and come in by force. No, only by invitation. Once you do open the door the blessing begins to flow.

As I meditated upon blessings I recalled Paul's Words, where he quoted from Isaiah:

***“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,
And which have not entered the heart of man,
All that God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)***

You see, we cannot even begin to imagine the blessing, the glory, the majesty, the splendour of Heaven. But not only do these words relate to eternity, they relate to today. God has so much to give here and now, if only we would open our hearts and receive.

Paul writes to the Ephesians: ***“¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.***

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Paul is praying that Christians would experience the fullness of God's blessings. God has so much to give to each one of us.

The key to receiving is trusting in Him. To never ever turn away from Him. How much we experience His blessing is proportional to our trusting Him.

If we are serious in our prayer asking God to bless us and to bless Latvia, and the Latvian people, then we should demonstrate our seriousness, by bowing the knee before Him. By humbling ourselves and putting our trust fairly and squarely in Him alone.

Then we will be that tree Jeremiah is talking about that is planted by waters, that bears good fruit. Everything we do will succeed to God's glory.

Amen.

Pastor Colvin S. MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.

All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.