

To God Alone Be The Glory

During my school days I was introduced to an old game called “Truth or Consequences.” The object of the game is to strip away the facades people put up so participants can get to know who each other really is. When it’s your turn, you are asked, “Truth or Consequences?” In other words, do you wish to answer truthfully a question about yourself—possibly an embarrassing question—or would you rather have to do something embarrassing right here and now? “Truth or Consequences?” Of course, if you choose “Truth” and you are caught lying, you will have to face some severely embarrassing consequences.

Our Savior-God comes to us this morning through the prophet Jeremiah with a similar phrase, but this time it’s not a question or a game. It’s reality. TRUST OR CONSEQUENCES. God’s not trying get to know who we really are. He knows us. He wants us to know him better and to trust him completely. TRUST OR CONSEQUENCES. He’s not trying to embarrass us. In fact he’s trying to save us from embarrassment in this life and in eternity. He’s also trying to get us to know ourselves better through this Scripture, especially so we can tell when we are not trusting him. He knows that those who do not trust him will face consequences, some of which are worse than embarrassment. And he doesn’t want those consequences for anyone.

Listen. ⁵*This is what the LORD says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.”* Wow, the Lord is serious. “Cursed”: in other words, the almighty God himself is going to work against this group, and they will be powerless to stop him. TRUST the Lord OR you will face CONSEQUENCES.

Now why would the Lord be so harsh (*Cursed is the one who trusts in man*)? It helps to know how God’s people were behaving at that time. The Israelites had become so accustomed to doing certain sins that now they found it difficult to change. By giving in to their sinful desires, they had made themselves weak toward those temptations. Are you old enough to have experienced this in your life? Maybe you trusted in your sense of right and wrong, and later realized it wasn’t exactly lined up with God’s sense of right and wrong. Or maybe you trusted in your strength of character to get close to sin and not get sucked in, but you got sucked in anyway. Or you let yourself get away with something that God doesn’t allow, thinking you could keep yourself from slipping too far down the slippery slope, but it was slipperier than you realized. For days or even years after that, you had difficulty fighting off that temptation. See? Even for believers there are consequences for trusting in yourself over the Lord.

In another chapter of the Bible the Lord

points out one of the consequences that had happened to Israel for trusting in themselves more than in Him: their children knew more about false gods than they did about the Lord. Today he might put it this way, “Your young ones can play their favorite movie for you, and they can sing all the songs by heart, but can they show you a picture of Jesus and tell you what he did for them?” Or God might challenge you with this: “You can name ten players from the Vikings, Twins, Gophers or Tigers, but can you recite the Ten Commandments and find them in the Bible?” “You have favorite stocks or clothing or food, but do you have a favorite Bible verse?” Now I’m not saying that children’s videos and sports teams and stocks and clothing and food are in and of themselves false gods. But when any thing or any person becomes more important in our lives than the Lord—then they have become idols to us. This happens in our lives as often as every day. It happened in Israel too. So Jeremiah was sent to say, “*Cursed is the one who trusts in man!*”

We still need to hear this warning. I’m chagrined that with all the Bible knowledge I have, I still find myself trusting in my own strength or in the savvy of someone else, rather than in the Lord. Apparently this problem doesn’t get any better with age because I know lots of people, even veteran Christians who won’t take out an appropriate Bible passage and read it for strength, but then they wonder how **they** are going to get something done,

or how **they** will avoid some particular trouble, or how some **person** has got to do something or else the sky will fall. You know what the real problem is? Their hearts have stopped relying on the Lord in this area. Think of any trouble you have found yourself in: you may be able trace it back to a recent time when you trusted in yourself or in some person other than Jesus. As long as we walk the earth, we need to hear the warning, “*Cursed is the one whose heart turns away from the LORD.*”

What are the consequences? Such a person ⁶*will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.* ?These consequences for misplaced trust? Yes, we can become just like the barren places where there’s one scraggly bush here and one over there. Can you sense the deprivation? When the rain clouds visit other places in the world, the bushes in the wasteland do not benefit. They aren’t even aware that other plants are flourishing elsewhere, that other Christians are being well fed on God’s Word. *I’ve seen Christians who told themselves things like this: “I’m not a kid anymore; I don’t really need to be careful about that temptation.” “I know it’s spiritually dangerous to do this, but I can handle it.” “I know all that stuff in the Bible. I don’t really need to hear it again.” “I know the Lord wants me involved in my church’s ministry, but let someone else do it.” Soon enough they find themselves

in a spiritual pickle. And then they say, “Why does God seem so far away from me?” At this point the wise ones call a trusted Christian friend or their pastor, who takes them into God’s Word and helps them see where they went off the rails, and then assures them of God’s full forgiveness and mighty help in Jesus. The foolish ones stay out in the spiritually parched places awhile longer, and they keep asking, “Why am I so thirsty? Why doesn’t my problem get any better?” Well, TRUST OR CONSEQUENCES.

Trust is the better path. *⁷Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.* You’ve tasted this dish too, O Christian, and you like it. There are good consequences for those who trust in the Lord. The Lord prefers to bless us for relying on him. I knew a woman who discovered that her husband had put them into debt by about \$40,000 in just a year! She could have crumpled into a ball and cried, “What am I gonna do? What am I gonna do?” This woman calmly turned to the Lord and reminded him about his promises to take care of his people. Next she called a trusted Christian friend to share the burden and pray together. And then she went to work repairing the damage. It wasn’t easy for her, but she is an example of exactly what the Lord promises will happen to you and me whenever we trust in him for our strength. *We ⁸will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no*

worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

It’s difficult to trust in the Lord when we live in a world that by and large doesn’t. Because we have a sinful flesh, there will be times when we deal with a problem by trusting our way of thinking and not God. But when we realize how wrong it is to trust in human strength, let’s turn to the Lord. He loves to tell us: “Don’t be afraid. I have taken away your guilt. You are still mine, and I am still yours. That’s the most important thing. Now let’s work at that problem, shall we?” The struggle is rarely over at that point. But you keep going back to him in prayer because your Almighty Savior is on your side.

Oh, it’s great to be forgiven! It empowers us to trust the Lord when we make decisions. I’ve heard of people, who after being assured of the Lord’s forgiveness and love, told their boss, “You can schedule me for Sundays, but not on Sunday mornings—it’s the only time I can worship the Lord with my church family.” One young man said this to his boss. The boss fired him on the spot. In a moment of weakness the young man then said, “Look at the consequences of trusting in the Lord! A lot of good that did me!” Then he looked for a job, and he ended up working for a Christian boss who would not schedule him for Sunday mornings. Later on he realized that trusting in the Lord had led him into a better job, and he grew in his trust for the Lord. You should see his faith now! He’s like the tree in

Jeremiah that tapped into the water of God's Word.

I heard of a parent who told the coach, "You've scheduled five games on Sunday morning. I'm trying to teach my children that Jesus is more important than these games, so we're going to miss three of these games." Now some of you are thinking, "Why not skip all five?" But believe me, that decision was an act of trust on the part of the father's new faith. A couple years later the child said, "Hey dad, if Jesus is more important, shouldn't we skip all the Sunday morning games so we can stay at church for Bible study?" People of God, there are wonderful consequences for trusting in the Lord!

Do you see what the Lord is challenging us to do today? He wants us to reexamine everything in our life: "Are each of my actions and attitudes consistent with trust in Jesus?" Some of the changes we need to make will be difficult because we're used to doing things a certain way. Ask yourself, "How much time do I spend working (Is it too much or too little?), relaxing, exercising, sleeping, volunteering, shopping? Is it all in balance? Is there anything I can cut out? How about my aging parents? No, to care for them is to keep the 4th Commandment, so I'm not cutting them out. How about Christmas decorations? Well, a few people might wonder if I hate Christmas, but if I hang a few less decorations in early

December, I could attend the midweek Advent service. Maybe I could also spend less money or make wiser purchases. Less debt rolling over monthly could mean fewer hours working and more time with loved ones. Then there's entertainment such as Minecraft/ TV/ movies/ videos/ social media/ X-Box/ PlayStation/ casual reading/ blogging/ surfing... Ooo, if I cut back by just 15 minutes, I would have time for daily devotions after all. I could start praying for so-n-so to know Jesus better. And I could pray for our church, and our synodical leaders (I've never met them, but I know we have them). And I could pray for all those people I say I'll keep in my prayers. I could pester the pastor until he gives me a project to work on for our gospel ministry.

If you reexamine things in your life, eventually you'll look back on your month, your year, your life and see how much fruit your faith produced, and you'll know it was because God planted you beside the streams of his Word and fed your faith. And you'll rejoice over how powerfully the Holy Spirit worked in your life. And you'll lay it all at Jesus' feet and say, "The glory is yours, Lord Jesus. You kept your promise, just like you said you would!" It really was as simple as **TRUST OR CONSEQUENCES.**