

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **February 17** in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **Our security in the Lord is deep-rooted and eternal**

Jeremiah 17:5-11 – The one who trusts the Lord is sustained and fruitful

Luke 6:17-26 – Accepting the kingdom brings eternal blessings

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 – Our blessing in Christ is the assured hope of new life

Also: Psalm 1

## Jeremiah 17:5-11 – Trust God, not man, to be sustained and fruitful

### Trusting in man is trying to survive like a bush in the desert

5 This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

*"Cursed" – attracting negative consequences, the opposite of blessed, see v.7*

6 "That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

*"Bush in the wastelands" – lit. juniper in the Arabah, a bush that shrivelled in the dry heat of the valley stretching south from the Dead Sea.*

7 "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him.

*"Blessed" – attracting God's favour, as stable in a life of faith as depending on one's own strength, is unstable.*

*"One who trusts in the Lord" – The blessing promised to the righteous man, Psalm 1:3, is fulfilled in Christ the perfectly righteous man, Acts 3:14, and in those who are righteous in Him, 2 Corinthians 5:21.*

8 "They will 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."

*"Planted by the water" – with a deep lifestream supply, in contrast to the drought-hit desert bush.*

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

*"Heart is deceitful" – first of three wisdom sayings about the flawed nature of human personality.*

• **For further study:** the Lord is able to heal and transform even such a broken and dysfunctional organ, and promises to do so under the new covenant, Jer. 31:33; Jer. 32:40; also see Ezek. 36:26; Rom. 5:5; Heb. 10:22.

10 "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."

*"I the Lord search" – only the Lord knows how deceitful and wicked human nature really is.*

11 "Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay are those who gain riches by unjust means. When their lives are half gone, their riches will desert them, and in the end they will prove to be fools."

*"Riches desert them" – just as the sand grouse hatches eggs it didn't lay, and the young birds soon leave the bird that is not their mother, wealth unjustly acquired easily evaporates, Proverbs 23:4-5.*

15-16 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. But He did not raise Him, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

17-18 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

*"Still in your sins" – the resurrection of Jesus is proof of the sacrifice of Christ and the atonement of human sin, 1 Cor. 15:3; without that we are unforgiven and under the judgment of God for our sins, Romans 3:19; Eph. 2:1-13*

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

*"Most to be pitied" – without eternal life, Christians just suffer deprivation without the hope and joy of faithful believers. Those with saving faith may suffer but like Jesus and Paul, look beyond earthly life to*

*the eternal, in anticipation and joy.*

**For further study:** Hebrews 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Phil. 1:21-23; Phil. 3:7-11.

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

*"Firstfruits" – In the OT the first crop or sheaf of the harvest was presented to God to show that all the harvest belonged to Him, and would be shown so in dedicated lives, Exodus 23:19, Lev. 2:12. Similarly Christ raised from the dead is the guarantee of the resurrection of all God's redeemed people, 1 Thess. 4:13-18. It is the beginning of the new creation of Isaiah 43:18-19, Isa. 65:17, Isa. 66:22. Jesus is the "firstborn from the dead", Rev. 1:5.*

*"The grace of God" – Paul is keenly aware that God's grace met him on the road to Damascus, gave Him a vivid vision of Jesus and led him to respond. And so the greatest persecutor of the church became the greatest church planter.*

**IN PRACTICE** Resurrection to eternal life is another of these eternal values – a long range certainty which has meaning for our security now. Because it is absolutely certain that Jesus rose from the dead, we can be absolutely certain that our sins are paid for. If we have made the choice to invite Jesus personally to be our Lord and Saviour, no amount of ceremonial or church attendance or good works will add a jot to the assurance we have of salvation to eternal life. It is being part of a kingdom that never ends. But the immediate security is being part of that kingdom that stands against every fear, oppression and trouble now – because Jesus is alive!

**QUESTION** *Some of your friends may follow other religions. As Christians we have the capacity to respect the beliefs of others. But can you think of another faith or belief system that has a personal deity with personal experience of the worst the world can throw at us, who walks it through with us, day by day?*

**PRAYER** Risen Lord Jesus, I thank You so much for dying for me, redeeming me and making me welcome in heaven, where I will be with You one day. Once again I defer my life to You, willingly giving up my independence and self-reliance. It is a small price to pay for the peace and security I have now, and the eternal future I possess, simply because I am yours. I praise You for who You are, Lord of lords and Saviour. Amen.

## Psalm 1 – Delighting in the Lord's ways is the key to fruitfulness

1-2 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither –

whatever they do prospers.

4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

**IN PRACTICE** Human nature is flawed and untrustworthy. That's the thrust of Jeremiah's message with the memorable words: "The heart is deceitful... and beyond cure" although in a later prophecy he sees that wilful, independent human heart overwritten with God's ways and aligned with Him, Jer. 31:33; 32:39. Who do we trust? Our judgment and our preferences? Or are we able to defer to the Lord in listening to Him and seeking His way? We have free will, but only one of these ways is life giving and sustaining; only one way attracts God's favour and blessing.

**QUESTION** *If God created us in His image and according to His design, why do we start off with this tendency to self-deception? Did events in the Garden of Eden have a lasting effect?*

## Luke 6:17-26 – Accepting the kingdom brings eternal blessings

### Jesus' inaugural teaching (Sermon on the Plateau) according to Luke

17-18 [Jesus] went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of His disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases.

*"A level place" – or plateau on the hill; both the contents and the setting suggests Luke is giving a shorter version of the Sermon on the Mount. He leaves out the portions that have to do with the Law, which are found elsewhere, suggesting that Jesus repeated his teaching on various occasions, Luke 11:2-4; 12:22-31, 33-34.*

Those troubled by impure spirits were

cured, and the people all tried to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all.

*"Healing them all" – the crowd did not gather to hear Jesus, they came with deep needs of deliverance from spiritual oppression and physical disease, through the power coming out from Jesus.*

20 Looking at His disciples, He said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

*"You who are poor" – in Matthew's account it is "poor in spirit" and "hunger for righteousness", while Luke emphasises material poverty as well.*

21 "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

*"Blessed" – experiencing the joy and favour that comes from God's grace*

22 "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

*"Blessed... when people hate you" – with its associated woe, v.26, Jesus recalls how the prophets were rejected, while false prophets were popular. The implication is that Jesus' growing rejection by religious authorities was his provenance as a true prophet.*

23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24-25 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

**IN PRACTICE** Jesus undoubtedly repeated His core teaching in various places and at different times, so whether Luke's account is the same Sermon on the Mount or another one is not something we need to debate. What is important is the kingdom values He sets out for people who have a sense of covenant, or belonging to God. The original hearers were Jews under the Old Covenant and their commitment was being a Jew and their religious observance – a bit like our claim to "live in a Christian country". But the New Covenant doesn't work like that. It is a choice to know Jesus personally as Lord as well as the One who saves – a choice for eternal life. Then we'll either trust Him and look to Him for our needs and direction in life, or spurn this blessing and learn the cost of independence from our woes.

**QUESTION** *When Jesus says, woe to you who are rich, blessed are you who are poor (vv. 24 and 20), what attitude to money and possessions should we adopt?*

## 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 – Our blessing in Christ is new and eternal life

### Our promise is resurrection from the dead – like Jesus Himself

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

*"Some of you say... no resurrection" – probably in their letter to him referred to in 1 Cor. 7:1. Greeks believed either that death was final, or in an immortality of the soul, but not in a possible bodily resurrection.*

*"Christ has been raised" – expressed in a verb form*

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

*"Rich... well fed" – the counterpart of poor and hungry, vv.20-21.*

*"Blessed...woe" – the OT perspective is that Israel is blessed in a covenant relationship, Deut. 33:29, Ps.33:12; Ps. 146:5, therefore woes are God's judgment owing to unfaithfulness to the covenant, Isa 5:8-15; Jer. 13:27; Amos 6:1; Hab. 2:12-17.*

*Jesus also describes God's covenant people this way.*

26 "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."

*that conveys certainty, repeated in this passage six times from v.12-20.*

13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

*"If Christ has not been raised" – Jesus' resurrection is a foundational truth for Christians; if that is in doubt, the preaching of the gospel is disempowered.*