THE LORD IS OUR ONE SOURCE OF BLESSINGS

1. Self-reliance forfeits God’s blessings
2. Trust in the Lord yields unending blessings

Do you ever have trouble sleeping at night? Sometimes it is tough to get a full night of sound sleep. If you have a big event or a major test to look forward to the next day, it may be more difficult to relax and settle your nerves. Or the night before Christmas, if you open presents on Christmas morning, kids especially know how slowly the night hours pass, anticipating what cannot come soon enough - opening your presents. For many of us, a good night's sleep can be few and far between, not so much because we are excited, but because we put the burden of handling our life's challenges on ourselves.

In so doing we are just like the people of Judah. The prophet Jeremiah was called to announce God's judgment, his curse on them for their idolatry, for putting their trust in their own power and creations of wood and stone. For such self-reliance they forfeited God's blessings. But to those who trust in the Lord completely, Jeremiah reminds them of God's unending blessings. Through the words of our text God reminds us to trust in him alone, because the Lord is our one source of blessings.

If you looked carefully at the text, consisting of 4 verses, you may have noticed how it is basically divided to distinguish those who trust in the Lord completely and those who rely on themselves in one way or another. The people of Judah had entered into a bi-lateral (two-sided) covenant with God: If you obey me, I will bless you and keep you safe from your enemies. If you disobey me, you will be on your own.

When the prophet Jeremiah served the Lord, his job was not a desirable one. He had the task of pronouncing gloom and doom - God's judgment against this rebellious and self-absorbed people. The Lord had rescued them and forgiven them again and again, but they still did not learn. Even as Jeremiah predicted the onslaught of the Babylonian empire against Judah - that it was because they had turned from God to their own man-made idols - their response was not to beg God's forgiveness and rely on his mercy. Instead they turned to Egypt to help them fight the losing battle against Babylon. Their strength, as they perceived it, depended not on the Lord, but on their own planning and power.

Our text says: This is what the Lord says. Cursed is anyone who trusts in mankind, who seeks his strength from human flesh, and who turns his heart away from the Lord. He will be like a juniper bush in the wasteland. He will not see good things when they come. He lives in a dry place in the wilderness, in a salty land where no one lives. Now they were bringing upon themselves God's curse: isolation, like a bush in the wastelands, a self-reliant people, removed from their home and isolated in captivity; deprivation, parched and suffering in the desert, with no relief of God's protection and security. And they faced condemnation, like that bush in the middle of a salt-plain, with no hope of survival. The troubles and difficulties they faced were a result of their self-reliance.

God allows us to struggle with troubles and difficulties also. We want to be careful not to automatically assume that they are curses or punishment from God. Those who fail to trust in God's loving hand in all cases and situations are prone to such assumptions: I must have done something wrong to deserve this. Or worse yet: God is being unfair; I do not deserve this hardship. It is easy to see where the focus lies.

God wants us to keep the focus on him, to put our whole confidence in his loving will for us. We can persevere and endure life's troubles and hardship by turning to the one source of all our blessings - to our Lord. Peter reminds us: Cast all your anxiety on him, because he
cares for you. At times, however, our sinful nature insists on casting our anxieties and fears on ourselves. **God handles the little things, but for the big problems maybe I need to help him out and make things happen.** The moment we start relying on our own ability to work things out, we begin to lose the battle, and we turn further away from God.

Like the people of Judah, who in captivity cried out to the Lord for help, we confess that we are often guilty of doubting our Lord's loving hand in all events of our lives. By grace and through faith in Christ, we turn to him for forgiveness, and every time he blesses us with forgiveness, reminding us of his continued promises of salvation. He wants our full and complete trust for all our needs, no matter how big or small. We can take it to the Lord in prayer, and he will hear and answer us for Jesus' sake.

The fact that we can approach God in prayer at any time and for any reason is an example of God's faithfulness and unfailing love for us. We have failed and disappointed ourselves many times. We have not been perfect, as God has demanded us to be. But there at the cross Jesus fulfilled God's demands and re-created our relationship with God, taking up all our sins and paying the price to forgive us. St Paul tells us: **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?** We have every reason to turn to him and rely on him alone, because trust in the Lord yields unending blessings.

For over 240 years, since the Declaration of Independence, our country has been blessed with a prosperity that's propelled us to become **most powerful nation on earth.** Consider how similar our modern USA is to the country of Judah in Jeremiah's day. Economic prosperity coupled with widespread godlessness and a culture focused on self-gratification. If we had the same covenant with God that Judah had, it would be likely that God's curse would come down on all of us as well. As a country we certainly do not receive what we truly deserve, especially for our culture's philosophy self-reliance.

Thankfully, also, as believers what we receive from God does not depend on our obedience, as was the covenant between God and Judah. Remember their two-sided covenant - God's blessing in return for their obedience. When Christ Jesus sacrificed his perfect life for our sins, he established a new, one-sided covenant between God and mankind. Now, for Jesus' sake, God provides his believers with unending blessings. Even our faith is a gift of God, through which we receive all other blessings.

Our reading says: **But blessed is anyone who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by water. It sends out its roots to the stream. It does not fear the heat when it comes. Its leaves will remain green. It is not concerned about a time of drought.** It does not stop producing fruit. As Christians we consider even our temptations and disasters to be blessings from God. It is not just wishful thinking or, as some people might say: **Christians have to pretend and think happy thoughts, because that is the only way they will survive.**

Our troubles and disasters are blessings to us, first of all, because they show us that some things are beyond our control. We cannot rely on ourselves for anything. That is a painful thing to admit! But God tells us that he allows us to struggle and face hard times, so that we learn to despair of ourselves and our own strength. And he teaches us to turn to him who has all power and wisdom to make all things work out for our good. And he promises to give us the strength to bear up under any temptation. No matter what comes our way, we have no reason to be afraid, even when things do not go our way.

Recall your high school or college days, when other people would ask you: **So, do you know what you want to major in? Do you know what career field you hope to get into?** I was sure I was going to become a doctor or professional soccer player. I am nowhere near
that plan. The point is, our life does not always turn out the way we plan. As believers, we have come to see how so often our plans have been different from what God planned. And we know how it always has worked out for our best, because it is God's plan, not ours. Even when the heat of temptation and the drought of distress loom over us, we do not fear or worry. By God's grace we find refuge and comfort in his gospel, which will produce even greater fruits of peace, patience and hope.

To this end, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we will continue to put our whole trust in the Lord, because the Lord is our one source of blessings. The next time you have trouble sleeping, because your mind and heart are so preoccupied with the burdens and busy-ness of this life, ask your Lord for the strength to refocus. May the Lord sharpen our spiritual eyes to always see who is really in control, blessing us with every physical and spiritual blessing, exactly when we need it. God grant you sound and peaceful rest, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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