

CHANGE! - WHICH PATH IS BEST?

Scripture used: Jeremiah 17:5-11 (NIV)

OVERVIEW

We continue the series on Change. We continue based on the prayer challenge, "God, show me the right path, give me the wisdom to know the next step and grant me the courage to take it." The question we discuss is "What path should we take? What change should we make? If we think about the choices that we usually take, we find that we make our decisions based on what will make us happy. People say "follow your heart", and we hear songs like "Listen to your heart, there's nothing else you can do." But is that the best choice?

Jeremiah 17 identifies two groups of people. The first group is identified as the ones who trust in man's judgement and strength and whose hearts are apart from the Lord. This is the group that "listens to their hearts." The second group is the blessed group, who trusts in the Lord. They are described as being like trees rooted to living water. Jeremiah then argues that our hearts are not to be trusted because they are deceitful. Following our hearts does NOT result in enduring happiness. But when we pray and put our trust in God, He replaces our values with HIS values so that we can enjoy the things in life *while rooted in Him*. Perhaps the song that we listen to should be "Listen to GOD'S heart, There's nothing else we can do!"

KEY POINTS

- 1) Sometimes, following our hearts is exactly the opposite of being the right choice. - Jeremiah 17 was a judgement against Israel, that even though Israel thought they all belonged to the second group, they were in fact part of the first. He was making the point that our hearts are NOT to be trusted. It is so easy for Christians to believe that they are in the second group yet actually be in the first. We may think we are putting our hope in God when in fact our hope is in ourselves because we are deceived.
- 2) Simply following our hearts, which can so easily deceive us, does not result in enduring joy and happiness. - Like the example of Benjamin Lovell, what we have been given is never ours to keep because it does not belong to us. Even though, while we had it, it felt pretty good, it WILL be taken away. Circumstances can change in an instant (like death), and our hopes can disappear. With all we have, we will not find true happiness (vs Jer 17:11).
- 3) Enduring joy and happiness is rooted in a relationship with God, who can transform our hearts. - Some of us may be skeptical in this statement because either we don't have a relationship with God or we are not yet at that point of trusting God. But God proves this through fulfilling His promise to the Israelites that He has plans to give them hope and a future (Jer. 29:11). When we choose to trust God, we will find that He will fulfill His plan for each of us in all circumstances like our relationships, our jobs, even our looks or pleasures. Jeremiah shared that God is the anchor in ALL of these things.
- 4) With transformed hearts, we can be the person that God created us to be and do what God is calling us to do, which is the ultimate path of happiness and holiness. - Holiness is not what we often think it means. It doesn't imply we need to become monks. Rather, holiness is when we think of our choices, when we choose God's calling for us, and not just what our hearts tell us. *Also, it is important that we pray over our choices, but the act of praying should NOT be a means to avoid or procrastinate on the things that we should concretely be doing.*

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** What was your reaction to Jeremiah's charge against all the Israelites who thought their trust was in God when in fact it was in themselves? When you evaluate yourself, where would you honestly place yourself? Where would Jeremiah place you?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** Identify a decision or circumstance in your life where it seemed to make sense just to follow your heart. What path did you end up taking and did it end up in enduring happiness?
- 3) **DO** Identify one concrete decision in your pursuit of happiness in either your job, your relationship, your pursuit of personal pleasure, etc. Pray and listen for God's heart. Write down what God is challenging you to do. Pray for the courage to take the path, and take it! Share your testimony.