

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Jeremiah 17:5-10

NRSV

The ideas expressed in this reading are atypical for Jeremiah's time; they seem to reflect the thinking of later centuries, when books of wisdom literature (e.g. Proverbs, Wisdom) were written. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, contrasts the fates of the ungodly and the godly. The ungodly purposely "turn away" from God; they "trust" (believe) in humankind's power and strength. On the other hand, the godly truly "trust" in God. V. 6 likens the ungodly to a "shrub": it dies in the desert sun. But the godly (v. 8) are like a "green" "tree": sustained ("water") and growing with the help of the "stream" (perhaps God's Spirit). They have nothing to worry about ("not anxious", v. 8).

To ancient peoples, the "heart" (v. 9) was not only the centre of emotions, feelings, moods and passions but also of will and motive power for the limbs. The heart discerned good from evil; it was also the centre of decision-making. Conversion to God's ways took place in the heart. In v. 9, it is said to be where evil begins. Only God can see clearly the intentions of the heart; only he can properly judge humans in their actions. God rewards people for the good they do, and condemns them for evil deeds. In v. 11, God reminds the reader that, in the end, wealth acquired unjustly does not benefit a person, for it does not extend his life. (The notion of life after death was yet to be realized.)

Psalms 1

NRSV

This psalm contrasts the fate of the godly and the ungodly (as does our reading from Jeremiah). Vv. 1-3 speak of the happiness of the godly. They do not live as the ungodly do; rather they constantly ("day and night", v. 2) and joyfully study and observe Mosaic law; their well-being is like trees which bear fruit; they are prosperous. On the other hand, the ungodly are like "chaff" (v. 4): in manual threshing, the wind blows it away; it is discarded. So, says v. 5, their fate will be disaster: they will be excluded from the fellowship enjoyed by those who follow God's ways, and will suffer – unlike the godly, over whom God keeps watch.

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

NRSV

Paul continues his argument against those at Corinth who deny that Christians will be resurrected bodily. He has written of three basic doctrines he has received and passed on: Christ died, was buried, and rose. Perhaps he is countering some who attached all importance to the spirit, thus neglecting physical, earthly, living. Perhaps they, under the influence of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, believed that they already possessed eternal life. For such people, resurrection would be meaningless. It was commonly thought that only the soul is immortal. He now confronts these people with a logical argument and the consequences of

their denial, and tells the benefits of affirming resurrection.

In v. 12, he restates a point: a tenet of our faith is that Jesus physically rose after being dead. He did this as a human being, so how can some argue that physical resurrection of humans does not exist? In vv. 13ff, he states five logical consequences if these people are correct: (1) Jesus was not raised (vv. 13,16); (2) Paul's ("our", v. 14) preaching is "in vain", unproductive, i.e. has not introduced anything new into his readers' lives; (3) the faith of his readers is "futile" (v. 17), ineffective, pointless, so they are still subject to God's wrath for their sins (vv. 14, 17); (4) he has taught something about God which is not true (v. 15) and (5) those Christians "who have died" (v. 18) are definitively lost ("have perished").

Then v. 19: if our faith in Christ stops with his death (i.e. does not include his raising), we are living a hoax, and a tough one: Christian life involves suffering, disappointment, etc., so we are "most to be pitied". Jesus' death alone doesn't gain forgiveness of sins (v. 17): it's his resurrection that does. If he did not rise, we are caught in affirming death rather than life. But, says Paul (v. 20), Jesus really was raised. In fact, he was the *forerunner*, the *model* for all those who have died (and of those yet to die). The "first fruits" of the harvest (the initial yield) was offered to God as a symbol of offering the whole harvest to him.

Luke 6:17-26

NRSV

Jesus has ascended a mountain to pray. While there, he has chosen twelve of his disciples, his followers, to be apostles. Now he descends part-way, to a "level place". There he finds other followers and many others, from Israel and beyond ("Tyre and Sidon", v. 17). Many are healed, both of known "diseases" (v. 18) and of *being possessed*. Evil "spirits" made them ritually "unclean" so they were not permitted to share in corporate worship of God.

Luke tells us of four *beatitudes* (vv. 20-22) and corresponding *woes* or warnings of deprivation in the age to come. Some are "blessed" (happy) by being included in the Kingdom Jesus brings. The warnings are prophecies, cautions. The pairs are: (1) the "poor" (v. 20) and the "rich" (v. 24); (2) the "hungry" (v. 21a) and the "full" (v. 25a); (3) the sorrowful (v. 21b) and the joyous (v. 25b); and (4) the persecuted (v. 22) and the popular (v. 26).

The "poor" (v. 20) are those who acknowledge their dependence on God; the "rich" (v. 24) do not want to commit themselves to Jesus and the Kingdom; they are comfortable with the existence they have now. The Greek word translated "consolation" (v. 24) is a financial term: the "rich" do not realize what they owe to Jesus. The "hungry" (v. 25) hunger for the word of God, the good news; the "full" are the materially satisfied. In v. 22, "exclude" means socially ostracized and excluded from the synagogue and Temple. The "Son of Man" has a corporate sense: it includes Jesus and his followers: they will be persecuted, as Israel ("their ancestors", v. 23) persecuted Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos, but "in that day" (at the end of the era), they will be rewarded. Jeremiah 5:31 says that people spoke well of "false prophets" (v. 26).

