



# THE NEW SHOFAR

God is a mighty blessing for all who dare to believe

Jeremiah 17:5-8 - Luke 6:17-26

**Ordinary Sunday 6**

*There is a God given way to be living!*

Jeremiah would be even less popular today than he was back in his own day. His message stands in stark contrast to the preferences of the wider society. What he condemns is a morality that takes little or no account of the divine will and a way of life that is based on what can be justified and rationalized by the individual person. The way we are to live in the world is established in the Law of God as interpreted, lived, witnessed to and proclaimed by Jesus Christ. We cannot just make this stuff up so that what is good is now defined by what I think is good or by what the world sees as being acceptable. The only *Way* to be fully human and fully alive is by living the *Way* God created us to be living, a *Way* spelled out in our scriptures. A look around the world will soon illustrate the emptiness of a self-focussed morality, a way of life that begins with me, with what I feel is good and right.

***Note Jeremiah does not spell out the content of this Way of God***

The contrast is between the man (*geber*) who is cursed and the society (*adam*) in which he has placed his trust, between the *flesh* and the *heart*. The *person* who is cursed is the one who is relying on the things this world (*the flesh*) keep reassuring us are the essentials making us strong and happy and giving meaning and purpose to our lives as men and women in creation. They have turned (*shub*) from God in the sense they are willing to offer worship to God but do not submit every other aspect of their lives to the sovereign will of God. Jeremiah offers the great image of the tree in the wilderness...*if good comes he is unable to see it...* because he has chosen to make his home in salt wastelands.

In contrast stands the person placing their trust in God. This person accepts the Sovereignty of God over themselves and their lives and they live according to the divine Covenant. The prophet continues with the image of the tree. This time, the person living under divine rule is like a tree actively thrusting his or her roots deep down into the soil, down into the spring of living water below the surface. To that person, *drought* and *heat waves* are as nothing and they thrive.

***The dark side of Shub***

Psalm 1

How appropriate is this reading as we move towards the opening of the season of Lent! Jeremiah is a prophet who speaks endlessly about the need to *turn (shub)*. For him, though, this turning is not just a turning away from sin and from the ways of the wicked. Much more important is this *turning to (shub) God*. It takes commitment and persistence and it is not going to happen by chance or by hoping for it.

The point of these readings today is to urge all disciples to be like the tree that deliberately and intentionally plunges its roots down into the cool waters. Such people do not wait in the hope God will pass by and pour water on them. It is about inserting God's ways into how we live on a daily basis. It is time to begin some pre-planning for Lent!

The person of this psalm is happy because they have transcended the limitations of human psychology, social norms and the measures and expectations of the world in which they live. They see how quickly and constantly these things change and so have placed their hope and trust in God. The only way to "bear fruit" and avoid the destruction of drought is to put down roots into Christ the Living Water from God.

## ***The Beatitudes : choosing the way we live in the world***

**Beatitude? Blessed be...** The Greek word for “blessed” has an incredibly broad range of meanings, from the mundane “have a great (blessed) day” to being a characteristic of the divine. What makes the biblical usage so special is the way it limits the gifting of this happiness to Yahweh alone. Blessedness is given and grows within those who believe, love, worship and find shelter in God. According to the scriptures, blessedness or happiness is only possible for those who have been purified of their sins, practice justice, walk according to the law of God, care for the poor, do not sin with their lips (lies, gossip, slander), do what pleases God and wait patiently for the coming of God as judge.

According to Philo the great Jewish Philosopher, God alone is *blessed* and the best a person can hope for is to be granted a share in this divine life.

### ***Where your treasure is, there too will be your heart (Matthew 6:21)***

Matthew’s axiom recorded above says in brief what it is the beatitudes of both Matthew and Luke are trying to say to their Churches. They are both talking about much more than an attitudes disciples should have. Rather, they are talking about the fundamental life option of the faithful. They choose God as the foundation of who they are and all they do. They intentionally bring the light of the Kingdom to shine into and have an influence over every part of their existence. It is about choosing God above all else.

In this fundamental option human values are reversed and the comfortable status quo is turned on its ear. This divine *blessedness* is not associated with wealth, but in poverty and in powerlessness. This is why it must be gifted from God and not created by any individual’s actions. It is only when God is their only option in life, their only source of enduring hope. These *blessed* children of God are religious people, humble, modest, unassuming who are ignored or rejected by the movers and shakers of this world, are scorned, exploited and subjected to all kinds of persecutions, both great and small.

### ***Blessing is what God does for the faithful***

It is in their afflicted condition that they are gifted with the Holy Spirit and filled with the gifts of happiness, and satisfaction. They are comforted and consoled and experience a genuine peace in the midst of even the harshest of situations. They wait for God’s justice rather than pursuing justice in this life. The tough and even miserable conditions of their lives naturally orient them towards God as they come to value spiritual realities and the things that bring true and lasting wealth.

In this same sermon, Luke notes the Jesus speaks of the abundance of rewards that come to those who are blessed. There will be *plenty of them, all pressed down, shaken together, running over and flowing into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*

### ***The beatitudes are all about God***

The view Jesus has of the Beatitudes flows out of the Jewish biblical tradition and it fits into Mark’s call to Christians to *imitate Christ*, to align themselves to Jesus in everything they do and in all they are. Rather than look at individual beatitudes and trying to work out what they mean in practice, it is better to look at them as a whole. When people actually shape their lives around the Risen Christ, they will give witness to these things and others will see and experience God’s *beatitude* in them. That is, something of the living God will be experienced working in them and through them.

The state of being blessed is something akin to life in the Garden of Eden prior to the coming of sin. The man and the woman were together and they were together with God (walking hand in hand with Him). They knew peace and longed for nothing. They lived as we are all invited to live. This state of original blessing was a reality that comes about because of the presence of God. What Jesus is teaching is how He is the only Way into the divine presence and all that flows from a deep intimacy with the Divine.

What might that be saying to us as we make preparations for our Lenten repentance?