

Pastor Paul Bawden
Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, December 14, 2008
"The LIFE We Need" - Jeremiah
Jeremiah 23:5-6

In an average lifetime, the average American spends:

- 3 years in business meetings
- 13 years watching TV
- \$89,281 on food
- Consumes 109,354 pounds of food
- Makes 1811 trips to McDonalds
- Spends \$6881 in vending machines
- Eats 35,138 cookies and 1483 pounds of candy
- Catches 304 colds
- Is involved in 6 motor vehicle accidents,
- Is hospitalized 8 times (men) or 12 times (women)
- Spends 24 years sleeping.

In an Average Lifetime, Tom Heymann

Life has been summarized much more succinctly in the seven ages of man: spills, drills, thrills, bills, ills, pills, wills.

Than someone else has said that life is what happens to you while you are making other plans.

Regardless of how we describe life, all of us here today are in different stages of life. We have physical life – we are alive, we breathe, we eat, we work, we talk, we go different places. We also have a spiritual life – an immaterial part of us which is spirit – for James tells us that without the spirit, the body is dead (James 2:26).

But there is a kind of life that each of us needs today. It's found in our text in Jeremiah 23:5-6. It is not found in humanity generally and in any of us specifically. Rather it is found in the word, Branch, which is given in Jeremiah 23:5.

But before we look at what this word Branch means let's look at the life of Jeremiah who God used to tell us about the Branch.

I. God's call on Jeremiah's life (Jeremiah 1:4-10).

1. God chose Jeremiah before he was born to be His prophet, His spokesman to give forth His word to His people and to also tell them about the future (1:4).

There are some amazing words here about God's omniscience. He told Jeremiah that He knew him before he was born. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:15 that God has set him apart to be God's minister from the time of his birth.

Does this mean, as one group teaches today that God has created a lot of souls and they are waiting to take on bodies? No, not at all.

What we have here is the incredible ability of the biblical God to know everything actual and possible, and to know who Jeremiah would be before he was actually born.

When our daughter Emily was young, she asked, "Where was I before I was born?" Our answer was that you were in the mind of God.

I believe that is what God is telling Jeremiah. I knew when you would be born, and my purpose and design for you was that you would be my prophet to speak for ME to a people who had turned from ME into idolatry and immorality.

The biblical God is amazing – Read Psalm 139 sometime – “Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them” (139:16).

This verse affirms God’s prior knowledge and plan of everything in David’s life.

It also tells us that there is the sanctity of life from conception. In fact, the sanctify of life forms the foundation for our society. There can be no justice without the sanctity of life beginning at conception. Without physical life having eternal value which includes the healthy, the disabled, the aged, the weak, and the feeble, there will no basis upon which to respect and honor each individual – made in the image of God. I encourage you to read the book, “Come Before Winter,” by Joe Bayly, if you want to see what happens when the sanctity of life from conception on is no longer an essential foundation of our society. Pray that God would change the mind of our new President-elect to realize the eternal value of life from conception until the grave.

2. Jeremiah’s response to God’s call on his life (Jeremiah 1:6).

Jeremiah doubted his own ability to be God’s messenger. Jeremiah tells God that he isn’t a good speaker and that he is but a youth. Some feel that Jeremiah may have been in his late teens or early twenties. A little different response from Isaiah who said, “Here am I, send me.”

3. God’s encouragement to Jeremiah to go for it (Jeremiah 1:7-9).

God told Jeremiah that his youthfulness was not a sufficient reason to not answer His Call. Jeremiah’s authority and ability would not be in himself. Rather Jeremiah’s authority would come from God. God cut to the core of Jeremiah’s response.

“Do not be afraid of the people. For I am with you to deliver you,” declares the LORD. God told this to Abraham (Genesis 15:1), to Moses (Numbers 21:34), to Daniel (Daniel 10:12), to Mary (Luke 1:30), to Peter (Luke 5:10), and to Paul (Acts 27:24).

God tells us as He told Jeremiah many years ago, Fear Not! I am your authority and ability.

God knows that one of the reasons we don’t say a word for Him when we have the opportunity is because of fear. We’re afraid of what people might think of us, or what people might say. Or we don’t feel adequately equipped. God says to us to not fear but trust in His authority and ability and do it.

God put his hand on Jeremiah’s mouth (the personal touch) that which would do the speaking for the LORD – a picture of God’s anointing on Jeremiah’s life, and said, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.” I will give you the words to say at the right time to say it.

4. God’s description of the message Jeremiah would speak for Him (Jeremiah 1:10).

- It would be a message to the nations and the kingdoms.
- It would be a message of coming destruction and judgment – pluck up and to break down – to destroy and to overthrow.
- It would be a message of blessing – to build up and to plant.

5. God confirmed His call to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:11-19).

Then God showed Jeremiah an almond tree and asked him what he saw. Jeremiah saw an almond tree – signifying that God was watching over His word to perform it.

God showed Jeremiah a boiling pot about ready to spill over facing north, which indicated that the invasion of **Babylon was soon to take place.**

II. Jeremiah’s ministry for and with the LORD (Jeremiah 2-52).

1. For more than 40 years (627-586 B.C. -during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah – kings of Judah), Jeremiah proclaimed faithfully God’s word to Judah that God’s judgment was coming unless they repented of their sin and turned to the LORD. Judah did not turn to the LORD and eventually ended up going into Babylon captivity. Jeremiah was one of the exilic prophets, prophesying during the time Judah was taken captive by Babylon.

2. In that process, Jeremiah experienced opposition, beatings and imprisonment (Jeremiah 11:18-23; 12:6; 18:18; 20:1-3; 26:1-24; 37:11-38:28). It was tough being God's prophet telling people of impending judgment when the false prophets were saying that peace and not calamity would come upon Judah (Jeremiah 23:16-17).
3. **Jeremiah has such a heart for God's people in their sin and rebellion that he expressed great grief (Jeremiah 9:1) and weeping for his people (Jeremiah 13:17; 14:17; Lamentations 1:16) – A picture of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 19:41-44) – Which is why Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet.**
4. When the forces of Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Jeremiah was given the choice of going to Babylon or remaining in Jerusalem. He chose the latter, but was soon abducted and taken to Egypt by Jews who fled there rather than face Nebuchadnezzar.
5. In Egypt, Jeremiah prophesied a few more years and apparently died there.
6. During his ministry God used Jeremiah to tell how long Judah would be in captivity – 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Such was able to take place when the Persians capture Babylon in 539 B.C. Than in 536 B.C. Cyrus made the decree for the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the house of the LORD (Ezra 1).
7. **In Jeremiah 29:11, after telling the people they would return to their homeland after 70 years of captivity, God used Jeremiah to speak these encouraging words, "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."**

III. Jeremiah's specific prophecy concerning the righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15).

Let's look at those verses more specifically.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch (sprout); and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land." Then verse 6 tells us this Branch will save Judah, cause Israel to dwell securely, and He will be called the LORD our righteousness. Jeremiah 33:15 also says that a righteous Branch (sprout) of David will spring forth to execute justice and righteousness on the earth.

1. The Person - the righteous Branch..

(1) He has physical life.

The word, branch, is telling us that there is life – and that there is LIFE in a Person who is righteous and will bring salvation and deliverance to the nation of Israel. He will do this as a King with wisdom and justice. His physical life will come through the seed of David, implying that He would rule on His throne – And He would be human.

But He will not just have physical LIFE, he will also be called, the LORD our righteousness.

(2) He has eternal life.

The word, LORD, is capitalized telling us that this righteous Branch will not just be human, having physical life, but He will be God, for LORD capitalized means self-existent, eternal, possessing everlasting life.

This tells us that the righteous Branch will be the God-man – He will be the source of physical and eternal life – of course referring to the coming Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What's of interest here is that God used Isaiah, the prince of the prophets to foretell about the same person, Jesus Christ, calling Him, Immanuel, God with us. Telling us that a child would be born, and a son would be given. Then Isaiah also said that a shoot would come stem of Jesse and a branch from his roots – Again in these verses the humanity and deity of Christ is set forth by the prophet Isaiah – who would come to be the Savior of His people as foretold in Isaiah 53. This would be Christ's first advent, and then Jesus would come a second time to deliver His people as foretold in Isaiah 60ff.

Isaiah was used by God to tell Judah in the midst of their rebellion against God that there was a true Messiah and Savior coming. **He prophesied from 740-680 B.C. before the Babylonian captivity telling the nation that judgment was coming if they didn't repent. He was one of the pre-exilic prophets.**

Now as the exilic prophet, Jeremiah some 53 years later is used by God to bring a message to Judah to repent because God's judgment is now inevitable. But in that prophecy God used Jeremiah to tell Judah that the deliverer is coming, who will be the righteous Branch, man and God, having physical life and eternal life in HIMSELF, who will be of the seed of David and the LORD our righteousness.

But Jeremiah doesn't just prophesy about the person of the Branch who would be Jesus Christ. He also prophesied about the work of the righteous Branch, Jesus Christ.

2.The work of the righteous Branch (Jeremiah 31:31-37)

(1)The Future New Covenant for the nation of Israel.

This section of Scripture deals with the future New Covenant that the Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch will make with the nation of Israel, when He returns and sets up His kingdom on earth. God will put His laws into their hearts and he will be their God and they will be His people. All the people will know the LORD, for He will forgive their iniquity and their sin He will remember no more. This will happen at Christ's second advent at the end of the tribulation time.

(2) The basis for the New Covenant to be established (Luke 22:19-20).

This is in the setting of Jesus establishing what we know as the LORD's table. Through the Branch's death burial and bodily resurrection, the giving of His life blood, to pay the penalty for our sin, being buried, and rising again, He would establish the new covenant, which is talked about in Hebrews 8.

The new covenant is actually the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. When Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead, He established the eternal validity of the New Covenant (cf. Revelation 21:3).

(3) Since the Branch, Jesus Christ, has come in His first advent, which we celebrate during this Christmas season, we now know that He is the righteous Branch who has physical and eternal life in Himself.

Look at John 10:10ff.

"The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy." Let me stop there. Who is that referring to? Of course the evil one, the devil, satan, himself, who works through various individuals today to promote his theology, his philosophy, his ideas of government, his ideas of economics, his ideas to take away our freedoms and make us subservient to those who want power and control. Think of the countries where Christians are persecuted and killed. Think of those who want to take over the world and destroy the United States of America. Think of those promoting abortion, and the destruction of marriage as God has ordained it.

What is happening in our country today is not some kind of football game in the physical arena. Rather there is a cosmic spiritual battle going on in our country to destroy the foundations upon which our great land was established – and to somehow short circuit the true Christians so they can't express their biblical convictions. I trust you realize that we are in spiritual battle today for our very lives and freedom in Christ. May we pray that God will somehow show His power to change the hearts of those in leadership to see the need to have His wisdom and use it. Yes, and to pray for those needing the Savior, to pray for ourselves that we will remain strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

But the verse goes on – Praise God!

Jesus continues, "I came that they may have life and have it in surplus, or in abundance, the supply never ends."

What a contrast is that!! What a contrast is that between Satan and the righteous Branch, Jesus Christ. No wonder Satan wanted to have Christ killed when He was born. No wonder Satan tried to tempt Christ at the beginning of His ministry to cause Christ to not fulfill His mission to provide redemption for the world. No wonder Satan tried to keep Christ in the Garden from submitting to the Father's will as Jesus prayed before His crucifixion.

Satan knew what Christ has said here. He knew what Genesis 3:15 said that the seed of the woman would bruise His head, looking forward to the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of the Branch.

How was that kind of life – resurrection life, eternal life won for us?

What does the text say? John 10:11 – I lay down my life for the sheep.
Note as well John 10:17-18 – I lay down my life, so I may take it again.

What's going on here? Satan is filled with pride, stealing killing, and destroying.

The righteous Branch, on the other hand, in stark contrast, knows that resurrection life, eternal life, is won by submitting to the Father's will, to pay the penalty for our breaking the Law, and to defeat the father of death, satan himself. Christ knew that only His eternal sacrifice for our sin would satisfy God's righteous demands and win His eternal/resurrection life for us.

Satan had some understanding of this and tried his best to stop the Branch from winning for us His eternal life and the defeat of the evil one.

Jesus died on the cross as our sin bearer, He was buried, and He rose again. He won for us His resurrection LIFE.

IV. The life lessons for us since Jesus Christ is the righteous Branch.

1. We need to receive the eternal life the righteous Branch has won for us.

None of us here is born with eternal life, neither are we born to eternal life when we pass from this life.

But it's the kind of life that each of us needs for we are all under condemnation in Adam, we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That's why Jesus said in John 3 that He didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

That's why there is the gospel, that Christ died, was buried, and rose again to provide us His forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (I John 5:12-13).

2. As believers in Jesus Christ we need to abide in Vine/Branch (John 15:1).

It's interesting in Jeremiah that Jesus is referred to as a shoot or branch, signifying that He has life in Himself, but also showing his humility and lowliness in coming into the world as the seed of David physically but also God as the LORD of righteousness.

Now in the New Testament after Jesus comes into the world, He refers to Himself as the Vine, and we are the branches, or slips. In one sense we are given the same title that Jesus had because we become identified with Him through faith, for the believer is in Christ. Since Jesus is the LIFE Giver, we must abide in Him in order for His eternal life, His resurrection life to come through our lives.

What does this mean then to be attached to the Vine, Jesus Christ, as His branches? Andrew Murray has some wonderful teaching on what it means to be a branch attached to the Vine, Jesus Christ – the believer's LIFE - in order to bear fruit for one's Lord.

(1) The Vine and the branches are inseparable in fruit bearing.

- Christ lives in the believer – Christ in you the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27). Christ produces the sustenance and nourishment for the branch. Christ is the source of life . Cut the branch from the vine and it dies.
- The believer lives in Christ - seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 2:6); created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10). The believer is completely dependent upon the vine, without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5). The believer receives His food from the vine, from Christ. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).
- That is why without the Vine, the branch can do nothing. Without the branch the vine can do nothing – We are His fruit bearers (John 15:6).

- That is why all the vine possess belongs to the branches. The vine exists for the branches. The glory you gave me I have given them prayed the Lord to His Father (John 17:22).
- That is why all the branch possesses belongs to the Vine. He is our LIFE, our all.

(2) The Vine Dresser (the heavenly Father) must care for the vineyard for genuine fruit bearing.

- He reminds the believer that he has been cleansed once for all (John 15:3). This means that the believer is totally accepted by God, accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6). This is the believer's position in Christ.
- Tells the believer that a daily cleansing must take place in his or her life (John 15:2). Takes away can refer to "He lifts up off the ground." Not referring to losing one's salvation, but God bringing His discipline, His encouragement, when one is unfruitful.
- It is like removing insects and other parasites from a plant. God allows certain things in our lives to help us learn to trust Him more and be open to His leading. God is in the process of purging and cleansing each of us according to our spiritual needs. He does it with grace, but His intent is to conform us to the image of His Son.
- The 15:6 talks about burning up the branch that doesn't produce fruit. Not referring here to losing one's salvation, but to the losing of the believer's rewards as indicated in I Corinthians 3:12 – where the believer's service has ended up as wood, hay and stubble, and was burned up by fire.

(3) Genuine fruit is produced in the life of the believer abiding in the Vine.

- **The Branch must always abide in the Vine. Key words are: "Abide in Me." It is a once for all command (John 15:4).**

This is more than just accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

I John 3:24 tells us what abiding in Christ is all about. John wrote: "And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in Him."

Being in Christ as a believer has to do with our position in Christ after accepting Him as personal Savior. Abiding in Christ as to do with our responsibility as believers to obey the LORD as revealed to us in His word, the Bible. Abiding is that constant awareness that we are dependent on Christ and we are seeking in the Holy Spirit's power to do His will as given in the Word of God.

That's why John 15:6 refers to when we don't maintain fellowship with the Lord and dependence upon Him our works become wood, hay, and stubble.

The believer in Christ needs to maintain daily fellowship, consciousness of His presence in one's life. When one sins, one confesses that sin to the Lord, thanks Him for His forgiveness and moves on.

- **The branch will always bear the likeness of the Vine.**

Grapes produce grapes. Apples produce apples. Pears produce pears.

As branches of Jesus Christ, we will display His likeness, His character, His kind of fruit.

Galatians 5:22-23 – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith meekness, and self-control.

Hebrews 13:15 – Sacrifice of praise, sharing what we have with others.

John 15:11 – a fruitful prayer life; Acts 1:8 – be a witness for Christ.

- **The branch will bear fruit naturally, supernaturally, and spontaneously.**

There is no fretting or stewing about not being a fruit bearer. There is no competition with another branch who has Christ's life. No branch is saying to another that I wish I had as many grapes as you. There will be fruit (John 15:16), more fruit (15:2), and much fruit (15:5,8). No compulsion to think its better than another fruit. Fruit in the believer's life will come as he or she obeys the indwelling Holy Spirit. Fruit comes not by force of some kind of dictatorship, but by willing submitting to the Lord's will as revealed in the Word of God, the Bible.

- **The branch's fruit is not for itself, but for those who come to carry it away.**

As soon as the fruit is ripe, the branch gives it off to commence afresh its work of beneficence, and now prepare its fruit for another season.

A fruit bearing tree lives not for itself, but wholly for those to whom its fruit brings refreshment and life. The branch then exists solely for the sake of the fruit. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Christ, of course, set the example for us. Note John 15:13 – Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for His friends - I have come not to be served, but to serve and give my life a ransom for many - Mark 10:45.

Paul said that for me to live is Christ, but to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).

- **The branch bearing fruit –brings glory and honor to the Vine-dresser (John 15:8).**

By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples, said our Lord. Good fruit is always a reflection on the character of the Vine-dresser. What a privilege is ours to let the LIFE of Christ within us bear fruit to our heavenly Father's glory.

God is always there to encourage us to abide in Christ, obey Him, and let His LIFE be displayed through us each day as we obey the indwelling Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is a process of growth, other times fruit appears quite easily. Regardless, it is a process.

I was looking at a letter we received from a missionary couple who had served some time ago in Central Africa.

The writer was telling about their planting of fruit trees, one of which was an avocado tree, Usually, he wrote that they start an avocado tree on their window sills, with the large round seed suspended by toothpicks in cans of water. After several weeks, the foot-high "tree" can be transplanted outside.

He went on to explain that the avocado tree takes 7 years or so to bear, and the tree usually needs to be "wounded" before fruit appears. He "girdled" the biggest tree with a saw, and flowers eventually appeared. They hoped to eat their first avocado harvest that year.

Then he added, "Since iodized salt is unavailable locally, goiters are a problem where they lived. One of the few natural means of counteracting that problem is eating avocados."

He concludes by saying, "Just as we want to enjoy the fruit of our trees, so God wants to enjoy His fruit in your lives and ours."

That only happens as we through faith in Christ, let His eternal life, His resurrection life, come through us in the Holy Spirit's power to the glory of God. May it be so in our lives this week!