

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

February 13, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Jeremiah 17: 5-16

Responsive Reading; Psalm 1

Epistle Reading; 1 Corinthians 15: 12-20

Gospel Reading; Luke 6: 17-26

Sermon Title:

WHERE DO YOU STAND WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Is Christ our Lord and Savior, or is He a liar and a fraud? His resurrection is the only answer.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1: 21-24

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks

foolishness. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

I begin this message with this statement of Paul because it is essential to the gravity of this message. There are many passages of scripture that can be looked at with a tolerance of the exact, specific truth of the wording or meaning. Examples might include creation in six twenty-four-hour days or 6 periods of time, or, Revelations being an exact prediction of the future or being a vision as seen by one person that might have strong credence in the exoteric meaning of the life.

Although to many these are extremely important, they do not challenge our Christocentric view of Jesus Christ and the validity of the Bible and its authority in our lives. These kinds of questions do not establish or destroy the validity of our belief in the reality of God and Jesus Christ. Paul knew the factual proof of God and His relationship with humankind. This is why Paul started and finished his teaching with the validation of God's plan and the reality of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus at Pentecost.

Many, almost Christians, say that they believe that Jesus lived, and that He was a good and noble teacher and person but that He was not God. They maintain that Jesus was just a really good preacher and that He lived and died the same as all of us, His human counterparts, only a better version.

Granted Jesus was addressing many Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the body. The Old Testament Jews often referred to death as “Sleeping with their ancestors”. When you “sleep” with your ancestors there is no interaction, no recognition and no life in the afterlife. This belief is shared by many atheists today who say, “when the power goes off, the lights go out”. No pain, no pleasure just eternal nothing.

We as modern-day Christians believe in something much better than that. We believe that God has a greater plan for our eternal future. We believe that we will be reunited with our loved ones when our physical life is over. We believe that in death we will meet our God and creator, and our brother, Jesus, our savior. We will be joint heirs, with Jesus, in the kingdom of God when we will not be just guests but will be joint owners of Heaven with Jesus. Wow! We do not expect much do we? The remarkable thing is that is exactly what God has promised us through His Son and our savior Jesus.

Those people who say that Jesus was just a “good and wise” man are talking through their hats. Jesus said that He was the Son of God and that He was God. Jesus said that He would be turned over to the religious leaders of the day and crucified. Jesus said that He would be raised from the dead on the third day and that He would ascend into Heaven “to prepare a place for us”. If Jesus was not God then Jesus could not have been

“good and wise”. He either knew that He was not God and lied to us, not the actions of a good man, or He was mistaken when He said He was God which would make Him deluded at best and down right stupid at worst and thereby not “wise”. These are not possible descriptions of our Lord and Savior.

There were millions of crucifixions at the hands of the Romans so there were hundreds of millions of witnesses. There were dozens of people who saw the empty tomb and proof that the authorities tried to hide the fact, and there were hundreds of people who saw and interacted with Jesus between the time of His resurrection and His ascension.

In our Epistle Lesson Paul says that if this did not really happen then we are to be the most pitied people in the world for falling for a lie, BUT there is undeniable proof that it did actually happen, no matter what the Sadducees, the Jewish leaders or the atheists say.

It is all real, so all the promises of God, The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit are also true and real.

It is so real that Jeremiah could say, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength... and Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord.”

It is so real that the Psalm reading echoes the Jeremiah passage when it says that this man would be like a tree by a river that would always prosper and bear good fruit.

It is so real that in our Gospel lesson Jesus says that those who are poor for His sake, hungry for His sake and persecuted for His sake would be well rewarded for their love and obedience as opposed to those who have selfishly looked after themselves instead of other children of God.

We all need to be gentle and loving as we introduce others to our Lord but we need to have a place where we draw the line. We can not be on both sides of the fence. If we are truly Christians we have to acknowledge Jesus as totally God and as totally a man in His physical form, that Jesus was tempted, that Jesus felt pain, that Jesus died and rose from the dead, and that because of this , and only because of this we are assured eternal life and reunion with all those saints that have gone on before us.

Jesus is Lord and Jesus died for us!

Hallelujah and Amen!