

LENT DEVOTIONAL MARCH 30, 2017

The Rev. Michael Gehrling '08, Pastor, Upper Room Church Community, Pittsburgh / Director of International Graduate and Faculty Ministry, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

SCRIPTURE

JEREMIAH 22:13-23

- 13 Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbors work for nothing,
and does not give them their wages;
- 14 who says, "I will build myself a spacious house
with large upper rooms,"
and who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion.
- 15 Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
- 16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.
- 17 But your eyes and heart
are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood,
and for practicing oppression and violence.
- 18 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:
They shall not lament for him, saying,
"Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, sister!"
They shall not lament for him, saying,
"Alas, lord!" or "Alas, his majesty!"
- 19 With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried —
dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.
- 20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,
and lift up your voice in Bashan;
cry out from Abarim,
for all your lovers are crushed.
- 21 I spoke to you in your prosperity,
but you said, "I will not listen."
This has been your way from your youth,

- for you have not obeyed my voice.
- 22 The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds,
and your lovers shall go into captivity;
then you will be ashamed and dismayed
because of all your wickedness.
- 23 O inhabitant of Lebanon,
nested among the cedars,
how you will groan when pangs come upon you,
pain as of a woman in labor!

DEVOTIONAL

Jeremiah offers a stinging critique of King Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was doing what we would expect kings to do: build a beautiful castle—“a spacious house with large upper rooms.” But Jeremiah points out the reality that Jehoiakim preferred to ignore or cold-heartedly disregarded: Jehoiakim was building his house on injustice. He was not paying his workers, and he was ignoring the cause of the poor.

None of us are kings, but it’s still easy for us to live like Jehoiakim. We can purchase clothes off of a clearance rack or bite into a chocolate bar without thinking about those who may or may not have been paid fairly for making our “stuff.”

Jeremiah reminds Jehoiakim, and us, that there is another way—the way of Josiah, Jehoiakim’s father. Josiah did “justice and righteousness He judged the cause of the poor and needy.” This, the Lord says, is what it means to know God. Indeed, this is what it means to know Jesus, who began his most famous sermon by announcing, “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

The prophet Jeremiah presents us with two ways of life: the way of Jehoiakim, and the way of Josiah. The way of dishonest gain, and the way of justice. Which will we choose?

PRAYER

God of justice, your Son, Jesus Christ, blessed the poor. May they experience Christ’s blessing through our actions. In Christ we pray. Amen.

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