

WHAT ARE YOU GOOD FOR?

Today's Text: (a) Jer. Chap. 13 (b) Matt. 5: 13- 16

Extracts:

1. Thus the Lord said to me: “Go and get yourself a linen sash, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water.” So I got a sash according to the word of the Lord, and put it around my waist. And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, “Take the sash that you acquired, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole in the rock.” ... Now it came to pass after many days that ... I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the sash from the place where I had hidden it; and there was the sash, ruined. *It was profitable for nothing*” [Jer. 13: 1-7]
2. [Jesus opened His mouth and taught them, saying] “**You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men**” [Matt. 5: 13]

Among lovers of horse racing, the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes and the Belmont Stakes are regarded as the most prestigious. That is why they are collectively referred to as the Triple Crown. A horse that is able to win any or all three is highly prized, especially by pool betters. In 2006, Barbaro was one horse moving in that direction. It had already won the Kentucky Derby and so many other races. People were looking forward to its performance in the Preakness that had been scheduled for Saturday, 20 May 2006. The television hype was unprecedented. The race started that sunny day. Then, the unexpected happened. Barbaro's right hind leg flared out awkwardly and the horse slumped under its jockey. The stakes were no longer for a win but for its life.¹

Happily, Barbaro is responding to treatment. In the past, a racehorse that was badly injured was immediately killed because it could not return to competitive racing. It was considered good for nothing. Barbaro's life has been spared but it will never run again. Therefore, to its owner, it has become good for nothing for racing purposes. In today's lesson, “good for nothing” applies to believers who are not carrying out the will of God for their lives. What are you good for? Let us find out in today's study.

¹ “Surgeon: Barbaro had ‘incredibly good week,’” <http://msnbc.com/id/13036999/page/2/>

1. Let us begin with Jeremiah's marred girdle

God commanded the prophet Jeremiah to get a linen girdle (called sash in NKJV) and tie it around his waist [Jer. 13: 1]. After sometime, God asked him to go and bury the girdle by the banks of River Euphrates. Later, He commanded Jeremiah to go and dig it up. When he did, he discovered that the girdle had become marred (ruined) and good for nothing [vv. 4-7]. Here is how God Himself explained the sign to Jeremiah:

a) *The girdle around Jeremiah's waist*

The girdle around the waist is like a belt that we use to hold up our pants. God told Jeremiah, "For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me, ... that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory" [v. 11]. Clearly, the girdle symbolizes our rightful relationship with God. He has caused us to cling to Him. That way, we become His people, and because of that relationship, we are respected and God gets the praise and the glory.

What is the content of that girdle? In discussing the armour of God that the believer needs to put on in order to be able to deal with the wiles of the devil, Paul writes, "Stand therefore, *having girded your waist with truth*" [Eph. 6: 14]. In the prayer to His Father before the passion, Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. *Your word is truth*" [Jn 17: 17]. We know that "truth and grace came through Jesus Christ," the Word of God that came in flesh [Jn 1: 14, 17]. That is why He is the way, the truth and the life and no one can come to God except through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ [Jn 14: 6]. So, God is saying to the modern believer through the prophet Jeremiah, *when we accept Jesus as His Son and obey Him, then the Father will make us cling to Him as a girdle clings to a man's waist.*

b) *The girdle in a hole in the rock*

In obedience to God's command, Jeremiah put the girdle in a hole in the rock by the river. Some days later, God asked Jeremiah to go and dig it up. He did and found it ruined and "profitable for nothing" [Jer. 13: 4-7]. God explained this sign to Jeremiah as follows "In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who *refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts, and walk after other gods to serve them, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing*" [vv. 9-10]. Clearly, *when believers move away from the path of obedience, they have rejected the girdle of truth. They become good for nothing. Let us dig more deeply into those two verses.*

2. Three areas in the life of evil people that God abhors

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(a) *They refuse to hear God's words*

There may be some people who have never heard the word of God preached to them. For example, in countries where the law prohibits the teaching of any other faith than the officially sanctioned state religion, it is possible to come across people who have never heard of Jesus. However, there are many people who may be occupying top positions in our churches, who hear the word everyday but still refuse to obey.

Take the biblical example of King Uzziah of Judah that God had blessed with prosperity and military prowess [2 Chron. 26: 6-15]. His success went into his head and he no longer listened to the word of God. Contrary to the word of God, he went into the temple to burn incense on the altar. Azariah the priest withstood him because it was the priests, the descendants of Aaron, that were consecrated to burn incense. The king "became furious, and he had a censer in his hand" to do what he had purposed to do. Immediately, "leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord." He was immediately cast out and his son was put in charge of the kingdom. Even in death, he was not buried with his fathers but in an isolated place for lepers [vv. 16- 23]. A marred girdle is good for nothing!

How often have we read from the Bible or heard in sermons to get right with God but refused to listen? Do we condemn others for "judging" us, claiming that God loves us all, even those of us who persist in sin? Yet, the word of God is emphatic when it says, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother (or sister, of course!), who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner- not even to eat with such a person- for what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves the evil person" [1 Cor. 5: 11- 13]. That means, correct members who are in error, even when they refuse to listen to you. To do otherwise because you want to be politically correct is as good as being one of them. Therefore, those who treat marred girdles as if they are still good for the waist are themselves also good for nothing!

(b) *They follow the dictates of their hearts*

How many believers actually walk by faith? They are quite few! Instead, the majority of us walk by presumption. At best, we may profess to be walking by faith but in truth, we are following the dictates of our hearts. Even if you tried to obey what God had said about your situation, it might be high up people in your church who would advise you to look at the matter *rationally* and *realistically*. Some people might be praying for one

thing but deep down in their hearts, they could not believe that it would happen. A double-minded person is unstable in all his ways [**Jam. 1: 8**].

See how Paul's faith prevailed. When the ship taking him and other prisoners to Rome was about to sail, he advised, "I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." The centurion instead listened to "the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul" [**Acts 27: 7-11**]. Paul spoke as a man with the Spirit of God. The others spoke like the natural man who "does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" [**1 Cor. 2: 14**]. In the end, those who followed the dictates of their hearts were wrong and Paul was right. There was a shipwreck and it was by the grace of God through Paul that the people were saved while the cargo and the ship were destroyed [**Acts 27: 14- 43**]. Those who follow the dictates of their hearts are like the marred girdle that is good for nothing.

(c) They walk after other gods to serve and worship them

God spoke to Jeremiah of "the pride of Judah" and "the great pride of Jerusalem" that He wanted to ruin [**Jer. 13: 9**]. Usually, when we hear of people walking after other gods or idols, we have a picture of carved images. How about the idolatry of the heart [**Ezek. 14: 3, 4**]? After all, what defiles a person, such as false witness and blasphemies, comes from within [**Matt. 15: 19**]. We also know that temptation comes from "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" [**1 Jn 2: 16**]. Therefore, anything that we place above the one true and living God is an idol.

In a recent article, Coach Dave Daubenmire, the founder and President of Pass The Salt Ministries, complained about "Good for nothing Christianity" which nobody fears and that is why people no longer fear God. For example, by condoning among its members fornication, adultery and divorce, the Church has compromised its ability to condemn homosexuality. In his words, "the god of self sits on the throne," and "we idolize sports, possessions and our children."² Therefore, idolatry is not as far fetched as we think. Those who follow after other gods and worship them are like the marred girdle that is good for nothing.

Clearly, when believers walk away from the place of God's grace, they have given Him notice that they no longer want to be labourers in His vineyard, that they are no longer under His management. So, what then are they good for? Like the marred girdle, they become good for nothing. Like the salt that has lost its

² Coach Dave Daubenmire, "Good for nothing Christianity," www.newswithviews.com/Daubenmire/dave22.htm, May 4, 2006

flavour, they become good for nothing. In the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, salt that is good for nothing is “thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” [Matt. 5: 13]. That was also God’s message to the people of Judah in the days of Jeremiah.

3. See what happens to those who are good for nothing!

Having forgotten God and trusted in falsehood [Jer. 13: 25], the people faced the following calamities:

a) *They were plunged into spiritual darkness*

Jeremiah warned his people, “Give glory to the Lord your God before He causes *darkness*, and before your feet stumble on the *dark mountains*, and while you are looking for light, He turns it into the *shadow of death* and makes it *dense darkness*” [v. 16]. What light can you get from a darkened sun? Those who yield themselves to sin and *remain there* are living in spiritual darkness and “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” [Rom. 6: 23].

Many people have gone astray. Unlike the Prodigal Son, they have not come to themselves, to repent and return to God. Instead, they believe in their newfound “freedom” to choose and live in sin. Why do you think that the number of blasphemers of Jesus has grown in recent times? Apart from what Bible prophecies have said on the matter, I also believe that it is because Jesus is today the only moral authority still standing. They cannot talk about Muhammad otherwise militant Moslems will kill them. They need not write about the Eastern religious leaders because they do not threaten Satan. Jesus is the only one who has spoken emphatically about His return to judge the world. Even in the church, the absolute standard of Jesus the Christ has been watered down by liberal-driven rules and doctrines. Therefore, the only way that spiritual darkness can be spread is to blaspheme Jesus and make the faithful stumble.

b) *The people become easy prey for their enemies*

Being good for nothing, the people of Judah became easy prey for their enemies. For example, the kings, priests, prophets and inhabitants of Jerusalem yielded themselves to drunkenness (possibly out of stress and worry from uncertainty), which made them weak and easy prey for destruction [Jer. 13: 13-14]. They would “be carried away captive” [v. 19], and other abominable things would occur to them [vv. 24, 26, 27].

Unfortunately, we hardly relate God’s judgment to our sins. Yes, it may be possible, as in the case of the man born blind [Jn 9: 1-3], that there is no link. However, the general principle is that the soul that sins shall die

[Ezek. 18: 4]. It was Samson who slept with prostitutes and revealed the secret of his spiritual power to a pagan wife. Having trashed God's gifts, he was captured by the Philistines and blinded for the rest of his life **[Judges 16: 1-31]**. See what believers are today doing with their gifts of prophecy, healing, teaching, etc? Having misused them through sexual immorality, sinful materialism and corrupt practices, many church leaders have been disgraced and disrobed. When you are no longer good for something, you will be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

4. Conclusion: So what are you good for?

Just as Barbaro the racehorse has been spared instant death but has the grace to live, so also God is prepared to give you another chance. However, the ball is in your court. You can choose to remain in sin, claiming that you were born that way, that the Ethiopian cannot change his skin or the leopard its spots. Or you can "do good who are accustomed to do evil" **[Jer. 13: 23]**. If you choose the first option, you are good for nothing and God will not hesitate to throw you into the trashcan of misery and hell fire. However, if you choose to repent, give up your human pride and submit to the will of God, He will cling to you as a girdle clings to the waist. You have made a wise choice. You are good for something!