

August 31, 2025

“Convenience”

Jeremiah 2:4-13

Intro:

In the 1961 inauguration of John F. Kennedy as the 35th president of the United States, he spoke these famous words: “And so my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”

It is a quote that is famously remembered and often quoted or adapted in some form whenever people are called to band together for a greater cause.

The sentiment is great. It is an invitation to come together, an invitation for self-sufficiency. It calls people to step up and participate in what is going on and not just sit back waiting for a hand-out.

But in spite of how good and noble and ideal it may sound, the human default is more along the lines of “ask not what you can do for your country, but what your country can do for you.” This thought process goes beyond expectations of our governments – it carries into our schools, our workplaces, our entertainment, and even into our worship. People engage in all these areas with the question of “what am I going to get out of this, or out of you” in their minds. We all want something, and, in western culture at the very least, we have been conditioned to expect that we should be provided that which we want.

When it comes to God, and to worship, this is not how we should be thinking, nor is it what faith is about.

Jeremiah’s rebuke:

Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah during the reign of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, and then his prophetic ministry shifted to dealing with the Babylonian take-over and subsequent exile of the Israelites. Suffice to say, his was not a happy task and his messages often point out why and how the people came to

find themselves in exile – basically, it is their own fault and the exile they are experiencing is the consequence of generations of failing to keep their end of the covenant relationship with God.

In our Scripture passage from Jeremiah chapter 2, the people are not yet in exile, but they certainly receive a strong message of accusation and charges of faithlessness being levied by God.

What is the main problem here? It is that the people – both the earlier generations and the ones directly addressed by Jeremiah in his present day, have traded their worship of Yahweh for the worship of other gods. They have essentially said “We want certain things for ourselves and we will go where we can get them.” What those things are doesn’t really matter; it is the faithlessness that is the problem. Somewhere along the way, the people came to the conclusion that they could do better by offering their allegiance to the gods of the other nations – to the Baals and the Ashtaroth’s. They also looked to other countries, like Egypt, to meet their needs for military protection and supremacy.

Maybe the marketing was better. Or maybe worshipping these other gods was easier or gave them a better sense of having control over what was going on. Or maybe the spiritual leaders in Israel and Judah were just not doing a good job of keeping the goodness of God front and center. According to the words in verse 8, this seems to be the case: “The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the Lord?’ Those who taught my word ignored me, the rulers turned against me, and the prophets spoke in the name of Baal, wasting their time on worthless idols.”

Things aren’t so different in our own day. We want things from God. We want to be wealthy, and so we expect that God will give that to us. We want to have good jobs. We want to be able to go on vacation to anywhere we want. We want to have influence and respect. We want to be the ones in charge and in control. We want health. We want to be blessed. And when we don’t get those things in the way that we think we should, or think we deserve, then our faith is shaken.

People begin to question God – does He really love us? Does He even exist? It is a short trip from there to arguing against Him – if God really loved us, then this or that terrible thing wouldn't have happened. If God was real and really in control of creation, then the terrible storm or natural disaster that killed hundreds of people and decimated towns and villages would not have happened. But they did happen and so people question whether they should believe in God. In looking for answers – and let's be clear the answer people need isn't always the answer they want, they shift their spiritual focus in other directions. Directions that are more forgiving or ambiguous, or towards faith systems that give a sense of control – if I do these certain things in this specific way, then I have achieved the required “whatever”.

But all of that is false worship, and false faith. It is a worship of self, and a faith of convenience.

The message and call from Jeremiah is to turn away from looking for what God could do, or what we think He should do for us (both future tense), and to be reminded about what God has done.

Verse 6: “They did not ask, ‘Where is the Lord who brought us safely out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness – a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and death, where no one lives or even travels?’”

According to that verse, this is what we should be doing – looking back to what God has done.

Verse 8: “The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the Lord?’. And even further than this, they actively ignored God and any knowledge of what He has done and instead preached a message of convenience that came from other gods and other places.

Conclusion:

When we treat God like some sort of supernatural vending machine, we are guaranteed to be disappointed. We might think we know what is best for us, but

what we really know is what we want. When the “best” that we think we should have is not given to us – either through answered prayer or blessing, then we accuse of God of not answering or not loving us. Or we are disappointed not because God didn’t answer (even though probably He did), but because as humans we are never satisfied and so we immediately look to the next thing we want or need. We forget about what God has done and therefore think that He is just not bothering to show up.

What we need to remember, and to refresh our faith with, is that worship of God is first and foremost about what God **has** done for us, not what we hope or want Him **to** do for us. Our worship needs to begin with acknowledging the good that he has done, and praising Him for it. This does a couple of things for us: The first is that it keeps us mindful and aware that God has brought blessing and answered prayer in the past, which tells us that He does care and that He does love us. The second thing is that it anchors our faith for the future. Because He has been good and faithful in the past, we can confidently trust that He will continue to be good in the future – even if we don’t get what we want now. God’s character is consistent. He doesn’t change mood or character on a whim.

So, as you worship this week, remember not to ask first what God can do for you, but to give thanks for what He has already done. May you find renewed joy and blessing in that.

Let’s pray.