

Dear Fellow Redeemed through the One who gives living water to thirsty sinners,

The Lord God sent His prophet Jeremiah to the nation of Israel at a time when God's judgment for their gross idolatry was just around the corner. In v. 11 the Lord asks: **"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all!) But My people exchanged their glory for worthless idols!"**

Jeremiah pictures Israel's foolishness with the words of our text: **"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."**

The people of the East believed that only spring water was truly fresh and able to sustain life. So also the Lord is the only true source and fountain of spiritual life. As the whole world would perish without fresh water, so the human soul must have the life that comes from the living God alone. Yet Israel had forsaken this living and life-giving God!

Instead, at great cost and effort, Israel had dug out cisterns for itself, preferring them to the bubbling springs offered by God. And the cisterns were not even able to hold water! They were broken – The idols had no life to give and the water of life could not be held in them!

BROKEN CISTERNS FOR BUBBLING SPRINGS – WHO ON GOD'S EARTH COULD DIG SUCH THINGS?!

I.

The whole idea is ridiculous, isn't it? Some educators may believe that "stupidity is the greatest sin." But here we see that the sin of idolatry is the greatest stupidity!

I remember standing as a child before my grandmother's cistern. I wondered how anyone could prefer to drink cistern water, collected from the roofs of houses. It has the color of weak soapsuds and the taste of dirt! Who would prefer cistern water over fresh, bubbling spring water?

But the same man who understands such matters in nature is blind when it comes to making a spiritual decision. Who would dig a broken cistern in place of a bubbling spring? There is a perfect example of this foolishness in the Book of Judges, which we are studying in Bible Class.

Judges 17 and 18 tell us that a man by the name of Micah took 28 pounds of silver from his mother. When Micah heard his mother curse the unknown thief, he confessed and returned the silver. But she took the silver to a silversmith, who made two silver images – one carved and one molded.

She then gave the images to her son, who placed them in his home and began to worship them. He even made a priestly robe and consecrated one of his sons to serve as priest. Micah set up a form of worship in his own house that was as close as possible to the one the Lord had set up in the tabernacle.

One day, when a Levite of the tribe of Judah came by, Micah hired him to serve as priest of his false gods. But sometime later, members of the tribe of Dan passed by the house of Micah. They took his idols and his priest for themselves and went their way!

The last scene shows Micah chasing after the people of Dan, crying helplessly: **“You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest . . . now what do I have left?”** To this the people of Dan replied: **“Shut your mouth or we will take your life also and the lives of your family!”**

Poor, foolish Micah. He had worked so hard to set up his own gods and worship. But if these gods could be carried away by any Tom, Dick, or DAN, how could they save Micah when he needed help? These god couldn't save themselves! In making their own gods, Micah and the nation of Israel had dug cisterns to take the place of the bubbling fresh-water-springs which they had in the only living God. When the cisterns were broken – when their idols could not save and preserve life, Micah and Israel “had nothing left”!

II.

But what does all this have to do with us? We New Testament Christians are living on the fulfillment side of God's O.T. promises concerning Christ. Surely we would not forsake the Lord of life and make idols for ourselves. No. But we could “dig” idolatry just the same! For “whatever we set our hearts on is properly speaking our god.” Whatever, we fear, love or trust above all else is our god! It could be prosperity, pleasure, or even people!

We could be setting our hearts on the most common idol: wealth and

pleasure. Compare how often we consciously do, say, give or buy something in the service of God and others with how often we do, say, give or buy something for the sake of our own pleasure or personal comfort.

Any one of us could become idolaters, seeking water from a broken and putrid cistern, while still claiming a bubbling spring. We can be thoroughly in love with and devoted to pleasure while still using the name of the Lord. That's what Israel did! While worshiping and serving the altars of Baal, Ashtoreth, and other gods of the people around them, Israel continued to offer blood sacrifices to the Lord!

After Micah had hired the Levite to be the priest of his silver idols, he said: **"Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest."** (Judges 17:13) Can we not deceive ourselves as Micah did? Could we not devote ourselves to the seeking of wealth and pleasure while saying to ourselves, "I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I belong to a church and I have a pastor"?

Let's beware also that finally forsaking the true and only living God for any idol is a gradual process that can go unnoticed by us. It takes a while to dig a cistern out of rock, as the people of those days did – a chip here and a chip there. So also a person may pursue this or that thing with great devotion, and not realize that he is gradually becoming a worshiper of riches and pleasure.

We should be careful of what we want, careful that it does not lead us away from our living Lord! We may end up getting what we want and losing what we NEED! Who could "dig" broken cisterns in the place of bubbling springs? – WE COULD. The seeds of idolatry are right here – in our hearts!

III.

What then shall we do? Let's remember that God's O.T. people strayed into idolatry AFTER the Lord had blessed them with goods, riches, and rest from their enemies. All idols, whether the silver images of Micah or the god of wealth of pleasure, or whatever a person serves with his heart's devotion, are "fair-weather gods." They arise and are made as soon as things are going well for us, when human pride thinks it is safe to ignore and forget to thank the living God!

But when prosperity leaves, so do the fair-weather gods. When the

greatness of our sins and the certainty of death grip us, the fair-weather gods sneak away like the water which leaks from a cracked cistern. They offer no comfort, no hope, no LIFE, because they have no power or life in themselves.

Only one God has life in Himself. That is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So Jesus says in John 5:26: **“As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.”** God has life in Himself. He was not made by any man, but He gave life TO man, and He supplies the world with life. In Christ this abundant life of God has been sent to sinners on earth. From the wounds of His cross there flows out an ever-bubbling spring of living, life-giving water. This water is channeled into our souls through the Word and Sacraments.

Shall we not TRUST the forgiving Word of Him Who is the only living Lord and Savior of mankind? Shall we not seek His grace and forgiveness for every idolatrous notion of our poor hearts? **I KNOW that my Redeemer LIVES, and so do you!** May we receive grace to love and serve Him alone with our whole hearts! Amen.