

6 Jan 2013: Preached by Elder John Leong

Topic: **New year 2013 Challenge – Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?**

Scripture Text: Jeremiah 13: 15-27

1. The prophet Jeremiah preached to the people of Judah of the impending judgement from God and their exile to Babylon but the people would never listen to God's Word. They would continue in their idolatry and followed after the false prophets. Hence in asking this question "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?", it is really a rhetorical question that has a clear and obvious answer of "NO".

2. It is a very discouraging answer but a reality to face. People will not change to follow after the Lord. The reason is given in v.23b that they are so accustomed to evil. They will not change their sinful evil habit and lifestyle. Today, we face the same situation in the Church. Christians will continue in their old sinful habits of inconsistent Quiet Time and prayer time and serving the Lord out of convenience.

3. This sinful habit is due to pride as seen in verses 15,17,18 and 22. The people thought so highly of themselves and presumed life would be the same year in and out. Finally judgment came upon them with the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon and the exile of 70 years in Babylon. Similarly, we are not willing to change for the Lord due to our pride that we think we can do without God. The heart of men indeed is evil and deceitful. The power of evil habit in men is awesome and cannot be broken by human strength at all.

4. However looking at the same question again and studying the book of Ezekiel 37 of the vision of the dead dry bones, we can now answer the question that it is an emphatic "YES". Why? Because God can make the dry bones alive. God can do the impossible. God can change the Ethiopian skin and the leopard's spots.

5. We can be encouraged that God has done in the Gospel time to transform the disciples and in Church history and even in our own church to save souls. We should not give up on anyone to think God cannot save them. We should be like prophet Ezekiel to reply the Lord with "Lord, you know" if the dry bones can be made alive. Our responsibility is to be faithful in preaching the Word of God. God can use us to change the heart of sinful men to give them eternal life and spiritual growth. God can change our lives too if we yield to Him.