

God is the Water // Jeremiah 17

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[0:00] The following message was given at a Sunday service at Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Jeremiah 17. I'm a believer. It's so fun to come to a different location and plug into a different local church with believers.

You just encourage my faith to celebrate your anniversary, eight years of trusting the Lord. It's just a joy to be with you, and it encourages my faith.

And I know there are some here today who are not believers, and we're so glad you're with us. This text today is from the Lord, and I think it's meant to encourage faith.

Encourage the faith of believers, and to encourage you who are not believers. I think the Lord wants to give some the gift of faith so that you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1:21] So this is God's Word. Jeremiah chapter 17. We're going to read and then look at verses 5 through 8. It starts off, thus says the Lord, and it really helps us appreciate.

This is God's Word today. There's one God, one true and living God, and this is His only Word. And He says today to us, through the prophet Jeremiah, Thus says the Lord, Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.

He's like a shrub in the desert. And shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Verse 7. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

[2:51] He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.

Father in heaven, I pray for the gift of faith. I pray for faith to be encouraged and strengthened today for your glory, Father.

Your glory alone. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We are living in a dry and weary land.

The message is, God is the water. God is the water. Get the water. You may have heard of Jerry Bridges.

He was a popular Christian speaker and writer before he went to be with the Lord a few years ago. He would come to our church regularly in Knoxville.

[4:19] And Jerry and I became good friends. He served us very well through his speaking, his teaching, and also his writing. I met Jerry on my 40th birthday and his 70th birthday.

He was teaching a class that I was attending and our birthdays were the same week. And we got to have a meal together. And we discovered that he had grown up with a guy named Bill Kittrell in Tyler, Texas.

And he told me Bill was kind of high society. And so after that, he always remembered my name and I think he kind of was a little bit intimidated that Bill Kittrell was with him.

High society. Remember that. He was a humble and godly man. He had a profound effect on Jerry and I. He was a great Christian.

Maybe the best Christian I've ever known. At his funeral, his pastor played a phone message that Jerry had left him before he died. And he was calling his pastor and he left him a message confessing something he was convicted about.

[5:37] Something sinful in his life. I don't remember what it was. I do remember thinking, you know, that wouldn't have made my top 10 list this week. He was a very effective teacher.

He wrote more than 20 books. Many of them are still widely read even though he died in 2016. So even though he's gone home to be with the Lord, Jerry still speaks.

Still teaches. Someone once recommended that pastors that we focus our reading and attention on one good theologian or one good pastor and then fully learn and really be affected by his thought, his teaching.

And I thought that was good counsel for me. And when our family was young, I thought it was good basic counsel for my wife, Sherry. And she loved to read.

She was a mother. Four children. And added to all that. Teaching the kids at home. So she had a full plate. So I encouraged her, focus your reading on Jerry Bridges.

[6:46] Master Jerry Bridges. Learn Jerry Bridges' thought. And it proved to be something that really ministered to her. She's so glad she did. She felt reading and listening to Jerry really made a difference in her Christian life.

So all this to say, I'm a big Jerry Bridges fan. And I listen to Jerry and I hold on to his instruction. It's really served me. And he once said to me, it's harder to trust the Lord than it is to obey the Lord. Think about that.

It's harder to trust the Lord than it is to obey the Lord. And after many years of kind of test driving that wisdom, I've found it to be true in my life.

It has helped me understand the Christian life. It's helped me learn how to live this Christian life in a fallen world. And if that's all you get out of this message, it'll be worth the price of admission this morning.

[7:53] It's harder to trust the Lord than it is to obey the Lord. Jeremiah 17 makes it clear that trusting the Lord is a game changer.

You ever played the game of life? Nobody's ever played the game of life. Good buddy, thank you. A charismatic in the front row saying amen.

What's the big fork of the road in the game of life? It's the choice of whether you start your career, you go to college. And this was because in real life, that's how many people thought in 1960, when the modern game of life was first released, the focus was on finances.

How much money you're going to make. Is it best to invest in college? It's still kind of a question today, isn't it? Is it best to invest in college so you can make more money later?

Just get started right off the bat making money now with a job that doesn't need a college degree. In the original game of life, which was created in 1860, it was called the checkered game of life.

[9:17] And it taught moral lessons. And the goal wasn't making money, it was reaching a happy old age. Like me.

Interesting piece of trivia for you. The game of life has a spinner, if you remember. Remember, you don't roll dice, because in 1860, that was considered immoral.

It was gambling. So they had a spinner. My, how views of the game of life have changed, haven't they? You know, nobody has any problem with rolling dice or gambling in our culture, do they?

So the question is, what is the big fork in the road in the real game of life? And Jeremiah 17 says, the big fork in the road is in our career path.

We have to decide whether we're going to live our lives by faith in God and His promises, or we're going to trust in the wisdom and strength of man.

[10:25] One fork says, trust the Lord, his or her trust is the Lord. One fork says, trust in man. makes flesh his strength.

And we face this fork every day. One fork is a life filled with blessings. And Buddy and I are here to say, it's true.

It's true. One fork is a life filled with trouble and curses. So two things are true. Trusting the Lord is the way in real life to a flourishing life.

And secondly, it's harder to trust the Lord than it is to obey the Lord. And the Lord has given us Jeremiah 17, so we can trust the Lord this week.

So let's begin by looking at the life of Jeremiah. If you want to, you can turn over to Jeremiah 1. I think we may have it on the screen.

[11:30] Jeremiah 1. The Lord called Jeremiah when he was a young man. Jeremiah 1, verse 4, Now the word of the Lord came to me, young man Jeremiah, saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

And before you were born, I consecrated you. I believed that. I appointed you a prophet to the nation.

And I said, the young man Jeremiah said, Oh, Lord God, behold, I don't know how to speak. I'm only a youth. But the Lord said to me, Do not say, I am only a youth. For to all to whom I send you, you shall go. Whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them.

For I am with you. That's a core promise of Scripture. I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord. So the Lord gave Jeremiah.

[12:43] He was a young man, and he was afraid to speak to these rowdy Israelites. But the Lord gave him promises. He knew, the Lord knew life was going to be difficult for him, so he gave him promises.

He knew he was going to be tempted to be afraid. That's always the challenge, isn't it? Will we trust the promises of God when we are afraid?

Will we put our trust in him? The Lord knew that Jeremiah would need courage. He was going to have a lot of obstacles in his life. He had to prophesy to a nation that, the Lord's nation that was unfaithful.

A nation that was willing to turn away from the Lord every time there was trouble. So, he was sending Jeremiah, and it was, he was a young man, and it was, it was a fearful thing.

So the Lord gave him promises. Promises that he could lay hold of and trust in times of trouble. Core promise, I will be with you.

[13:55] He promises you that today, and me too. So a great time, it's a great moment this week just to say, what are the promises for me this week?

One of them is, I will be with you. Think of other ones. What are the promises that you need this week? Do you know God's promises that apply to you as a believer?

I had an appointment with my cardiologist a few weeks ago. I had triple bypass surgery in 2023. I don't recommend that. It's no fun at all. And so I have regular appointments with my cardiologist. If you want to ruin your day, meet with your cardiologist.

Basically, he's going to look at you and say, you're not going to live very long. This is going to be a bad week because every week's going to be a bad week for you from now on.

[14:59] You're never going to come away neglecting the truth that life is brief. It's always a sobering visit if you have heart disease. What promise do I need when I go to the cardiologist?

Well, he's a good cardiologist. He'll get me through this. That doesn't work. That just doesn't work. David wrote in Psalm 40, As for me, I am poor and needy.

And the Lord takes thought of me. It's a promise. You are my help. You are my deliverer. Don't delay.

Oh, my God. That's the promise I need when I go to the cardiologist. It's served me. Notice that David's strength grew out of his sense of weakness.

So our weakness and our temptations and our troubles can actually be an unexpected door into all the ways that God will make us strong in him.

[16:08] Same was true for Jeremiah. Oh, Lord God, behold, I don't know how to speak. I'm only a youth. I will be with you. Same is true for us.

And in his final years, Jeremiah emerged from a life of fighting the good fight of faith. And he was ready to stand his ground.

He was a veteran soldier and he was strong. The main fruit that came from his faithful ministry through years of hardship was that his experiences revealed to him the inability of even the best of laws to reach the heart of God's people.

The laws were not going to change their hearts. And it all the hardship prepared him for his prophetic voice.

Speaking of his hard life, Derek Kidner, the famous commentator, said on the message of Jeremiah, no experience could have prepared a prophet better to hear God's promise of a new and better covenant that would create a company of the converted in the era of the gospel.

[17:30] Isn't that good? Listen to Jeremiah 31. Behold, the days are coming, lifelong, ministry, trusting the Lord, and now the voice of the prophet.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day that I took and take them by the hand, bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

I'll put my law in them. I'll write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me.

From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. It's a description of the new covenant that we offer you as a church today.

[18:48] We offer, if you've come today and you're not a Christian, we offer you the good news. This is the good news. There is one God. He's the living God, and he sent his only son, Christ, to die for people that would trust in him to be their Savior, and you can know the Lord.

That's the good news. In this new covenant, actually, as Daniel said, our great treasure is fellowship with God, a relationship with God in Christ.

We know him. We're reconciled to him because of what Christ has done for us. In the beginning of Jeremiah 17, you can look at this on your own later, Jeremiah confronts his generation about their self-chosen blindness.

It's a path they chose. He says, they bowed down to idols, to wood and stone. They were, Jeremiah says, beyond reformation.

You can't be reformed. You can't be changed. Their hearts have guilt engraved on them, and he said, you're beyond hope. Recently, Sherry and I, my wife Sherry and I, watched a documentary on Woodstock.

[20:11] Most of you never heard of that, but for my generation, it was considered a defining moment. I, as we watched it, the crowd was stunning.

They estimate there was a half million people that came to the festival. The organizers, it was outdoor festival, the organizers were expecting 50,000 people, and they estimate a half million people were there.

They kept interviewing people who would say, it's the third largest city in America today, the Woodstock gathering. It was literally a disaster.

You ever had a bad camping trip? This was a bad camping trip. If Woodstock defined my generation, it was very clear from that documentary, my generation was lost.

The main themes were peace, love, and music. It was good music. Most of it.

[21:17] And there was this absence of violence. there was kind of a laid back selfishness, unselfishness. Everybody was sharing.

People shared everything. But drunkenness and immorality reigned. I remember listening to the album that came from it as a kid.

Sister was older than me and I remember I listened to it and what got my attention was the vulgarity from the stage. And I remember thinking, that's groovy.

You know, but with the benefits of hindsight, I'm saddened by all the lives that were ruined by the unbelief of Woodstock.

And that's not groovy. I know a lot of stories ruin lives. Again, Buddy and I and all the old people here can tell you all about it.

[22:16] I know a lot of stories and my life would have been ruined if the Lord hadn't rescued me. For Jeremiah and his generation, there was no hope.

But the Lord made a promise through Jeremiah, other Old Testament prophets, which has been fulfilled in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the good news now means there's hope for every generation.

There's hope for the Woodstock generation. The passage that we're looking at drives home the fact that because we are human, we are all going to answer to God.

And there are two rival ways of life. Notice how inward this text is. Verse 5 again. Cursed is the man.

You. Cursed is the man or woman who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.

[23:22] Very inward. He's like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness in an uninhabited salt land.

The key word here, notice, is trust. Everything's going to turn on what your heart trusts in. The worldly man, the worldly woman who wastes their hopes on things that are shifting, things that are secondary, can't flourish in God's world.

And the reason for that is because of who they are. So that text is describing the person, what they really are. Or outwardly, you may see prosperity.

But in themselves, they're sick. There may appear to be blessings, but there's a spiritual desert. And it hasn't changed. And the truth about that desert is that it's summed up with words like thirst, cursed, loneliness, lack of fruit.

[24 : 38] And people can't escape the curse by trusting in it. It can't get out of it by themselves. And in God's book, this revelation that we have from the one true living God, the only alternative to cursed is blessed.

There's no middle ground. And the key to blessed here is faith. Look at verse 7 carefully. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

Jeremiah repeats himself. And he highlights the object of our faith and the content of our faith. faith. It's the person of the Lord.

And it's the man or the woman that's being described. Listen again to verses 7 and 8. This is how the Lord sees us. This is spiritual reality.

Verse 7, blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He's like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream.

[25 : 53] Doesn't fear when heat comes. Its leaves remain green. Is not anxious in the year of drought for it doesn't cease to bear fruit.

It's blessed. Notice this contrast. A desert shrub, a fruitful tree. And also notice that it seems to be that assumption that the man who trusts the Lord obeys the Lord.

The man who trusts the Lord bears good fruit. Seems like Jerry was right. Really, it's harder to trust the Lord than it is to obey the Lord.

Who you trust is a big fork in the road. When I, when the Lord saved me, I was 17 years old. I was telling the youth this Friday night, that's what old men do.

They bore you by telling you the same story all the time. the Lord saved me. I was 17 years old. My life was dramatically changed. I quit a lot of sinful things.

[26 : 55] And looking back, I, I just started doing things that were good and as I remember it, it wasn't that hard. The issue was I trusted the Lord. It changed my life. I remember I wanted a new hunting rifle.

We're in Athens, Tennessee. I can talk about hunting down here, hopefully, without getting shot. I wanted a new hunting rifle and my dad wanted to get, get it for me.

My mom was like, no way am I buying that punk kid a gun until I got my first grade card. The guy that led me to the Lord was a teacher at my high school and he knew that the king found none like Daniel and his friends.

They were 10 times better than all the other astrologers in Babylon and he expected me to be 10 times better than every other student because I was a Christian and I made straight A's and my mom got my first grade card, looked at my dad and said, get that boy a new hunting rifle and I've still got it to this day and I treasure it because it reminds me the Lord changed my life.

What's hard is trusting the Lord. If I'd have just tried to do better, I'd have failed. But the one who trusts the Lord, his life has changed. They bear good fruit.

[28 : 30] So Jeremiah helps us see how we harm ourselves. we see how a whole generation will harm themselves because they'd rather die of thirst than turn back to the spring, the water.

And Jeremiah shows us what to do. What we should do is not defend ourselves but cry out to the Lord for help. So let's ask, how can we apply Jeremiah 17 to our lives, to your lives?

Scripture's relevant. It's amazing how relevant the Bible is. If you'll open it up and think about it, it's exactly key to what you're worried about today.

Exactly. It's true in the details. So one thing we want to do this morning before we close is slow down, think about what's going on in our lives.

And here are three categories to help you apply this passage this week. Categories. Number one, fear, anxiety, hard times.

[29 : 41] Fear, anxiety, hard times. Do you feel anxious? Are there hard things coming up this week? coming at you this last week?

Then verses 7 and 8 is very relevant for you. Blessed is the man trusts in the Lord whose trust is the Lord. He's like a tree planted by water.

He doesn't fear when heat comes. He's not anxious in the year of drought. Never ceases to bear fruit. That's relevant for you. As you become aware of your needs, you awaken, your eyes are open, and God will meet you right there in that hard time.

Don't be afraid. Trust the Lord. You can speak to the Lord about exactly the help you need in the moment.

So this is a metaphor of what life is like. It's a visual picture. This is our dilemma. Cursed is the man who trusts in man.

[30 : 50] Cursed is the man or woman who makes flesh his strength. The Lord is speaking to the fact that Israel's caught up in idolatry, false worship.

They're worshiping false gods. They're being lured into this by the culture around them, by Babylon. and they're threatened.

They're threatened by all these political and military powers and they're turning to them for help instead of the Lord.

They're trusting in them. I don't know if you noticed but last Christmas Day Netflix, I'm sure none of you have ever heard of Netflix or have Netflix.

Christmas Day Netflix had two NFL football games. For the first time they had done this. It was a big deal. And so they really did it up big.

[31 : 48] They had a Super Bowl worthy pre-game show and what was striking to me as a Christian was the Christmas tree in the pre-game show.

All the ornaments were football themed. And they just they took the camera they went up the tree and when they got to the very top the traditional Christmas star that usually sits on the top was replaced by you guessed it a football.

And as a believer that was hard to overlook. The star that showed the wise man where the Christ child was born was replaced by a football.

This is the culture you're in. This is the air you breathe. When you watch a football game after every great play you know the player will separate himself from the team and pretend to tear his shirt off and show that he is actually Superman.

Pound his chest make muscles and they're big muscles. every week though we learn don't we that player is not a superhero in real life.

[33 : 15] But the overall vibe of our culture the NFL is celebration of man a trust in man very man centered. But there are exceptions.

I had a friend named Darryl Green one time he played for the Washington Redskins many years ago he's in the Hall of Fame he was the fastest man in the NFL he didn't just say that it wasn't a guess they actually had a race to determine and he won every single year and he once said to me when I was a very young pastor he said you're a pastor can you help me with this?

He had new coaches he said you know I know more about playing defensive back in the NFL than my coaches I've guarded Jerry Rice I remember I was standing there he was only about this tall I thought he's guarded Jerry Rice now you don't know who Jerry Rice is but he was really good nobody in this room could guard him I promise I've covered Jerry and his question for this young stupid pastor who knew nothing was how can I be humble I need to have moxie to play this position but he knew the man who trusts in man will not get the water he needs in the desert somehow he knew that he was an exception but that's counter cultural isn't it the culture around you is not boasting about their weaknesses they say I'm strong I can do it it's not going to encourage you to trust the Lord but it's deceived but it makes it harder to trust the

Lord than to obey the Lord when the air we breathe tells us you don't need the Lord and in our lives we can be tempted by that but the result is verse 6 he's like a shrub in the desert won't see any good come he'll dwell in the parched places of the wilderness in an uninhabited salt land David Pallison the great counselor said this about verse 6 the English language can hardly capture how vivid a picture this is of absolute barrenness it's a life that has nothing truly alive in it second category God is the water human flourishing being blessed is the consequence of a certain kind of life it's the consequence of a man or woman who trusts the Lord verse 8 he's like a tree planted by water sends out its root doesn't fear when heat comes it's not like life doesn't have any difficulty it's a reference to the hard times there's a drought there is heat things are bad things are difficult maybe you have an appointment with your cardiologist this week but here we see the nature of faith

faith is the connection with the stream the water it's God when you're connected to God you're not afraid of these hard times we don't naturally do this so think for a minute when you're anxious when you're angry when you want to try to get away like the commercial says you want to escape where do you turn Jeremiah verse 5 describes a person who turns away from the Lord it's the opposite of turning toward God if you skip down to verse 13 the nation was they have forsaken the Lord they have forsaken the fountain of living water this is the water but for those of us in Christ we have the power of Christ and we can turn to God and be changed and that's number three category real change is possible we're naturally full of thorns but we can be transformed by the gospel what makes the difference it's trusting the Lord what rules the heart [37 : 55] I've been enjoying David Pallison's take heart daily devotional I highly recommend it since about May of last year and at the end of 2025 I was looking forward to December 31st last day of the year in my little devotional reading through it I thought I bet this will be special you know I bet David has my David my counselor has some good thoughts for me on the last day of the year the text was Roman 7 nothing good dwells in you I should have been a hint and Dr.

Pallison writes what sins so picture me it's December 31st I'm looking forward to a little blessing here and I start what sins do you really wrestle with forgetting God proceeding as if life centers on you obsessive religious scrupulosity that starves your humanity defensive and self-assertive pride laziness or drivenness or oscillation between both irritability judgmentalism complaining immoral impulses fantasies obsessive concern with money food entertainment fear of what others think about you envy of good things that someone else enjoys shading truth into half truths to manufacture your image speaking empty or even destructive words rather than nourishing constructive and graceful wisdom and I literally at this point I went give me a break David throw me a bone I am guilty of all of this and I'm ending the year here not very encouraged that's I've fallen short in everything I'm guilty I mean really I was I was just like man I don't need this today and then I kept reading and the next line was this David Pallis I can identify with each one and I suspect you can too man that meant a lot to me our father loves us with mercies new every morning more numerous than the hairs on your heads and he is good and he does good and he has chosen to love us and we really do love him as street children he has rescued and adopted and he says you are mine so take heart and I will complete what I have begun and then I jumped into 2026 knowing God loved me thank you David for turning the plane around there for me God is the water get the water when I was a kid I was very fearful and my parents actually took me to a psychologist back when nobody did that that wasn't common at all and I remember the psychologist saying okay imagine you're going into a cave by yourself tell me what you see in that cave when I got done he was afraid he was scared and his counsel to my parents was there's nothing wrong with your son he just has a very vivid imagination and that's true but you know what I needed a little bit more than that you know

I mean that's that's what you guys are selling can we anything else you're just going to tell me you got a vivid imagination you know I'm 66 I still have a vivid imagination but I have more I have more than that Psalm 94 when my anxious thoughts multiply within me your consolations delight my soul when my vivid imagination scares me his promises help he's the water get the water father thank you for this morning we're so grateful for your word I pray for the gift of faith I pray that people that came this morning that aren't Christians would come to Christ I pray for believers in this room to be strengthened in their faith Lord because they can trust you we can trust you help our unbelief for your glory alone

[43 : 00] I pray in Jesus name Amen You've been listening to a message that was given at a Sunday service at Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us online at Trinity Grace Athens dot com