

Sermon Draft

Text: Jeremiah 17:5–8

Sermon: “Blessed or Cursed”

The text for the sermon is the Old Testament Reading for today, from the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah, verses 5–8, in which we hear the word cursed and the word blessed.

These are difficult times we’re living in. The pandemic, economic uncertainty, political unrest, financial hardships, anxiety over health and safety concerns all can magnify any personal turmoil we might be facing.

When faced with these challenges, where do we go or what do we do to get through them? Whom can we trust to help us get through these difficult times in which we’re living? Ourselves? Others? Or is it to the Lord we go for help in times of trouble?

There really are only two ways: either trusting human abilities or trusting the Lord. And to trust in the Lord is better than to trust in human strength. The difference is either blessing or curse.

There really are only those two ways: trusting in man or trusting in the Lord. The Lord said to his people, through the prophet Jeremiah, ***“You are cursed if you do not trust in the Lord, if you only trust in humanity and in human strength and wisdom, and if you turn away from the Lord. Rather, blessed are you when you trust in the Lord and commit your life to him.”***

The one who trusts in himself is like a stubby shrub in a desert with no water about, only salt flats as far as one can see. Nothing good is going to come from that. Certainly, no prospering nor full luxuriant growth. That shrub will eventually wither and die. Like the one who thinks they can do it all on their own.

In contrast, one who trusts in the Lord, and commits his life to the Lord, is like a strong, green tree that grows and prospers and bears fruit because it has its deep roots in the life-giving waters. It doesn't worry nor is it afraid if there's a drought; it can weather anything because it has a never-failing, ever-flowing stream of life to support it and to see it through.

In whom do you trust? Is it yourself? You wouldn't be alone if you trusted yourself first and foremost to get yourself through difficult times, or any times in this day and age. People will say, "I'm smart enough; I'm good enough. I've got enough money. I've got friends; I've got my networks. I can do just fine." You might say the same things and be proud of it. But what have you forgotten? What's left out of the equation? God!

If these are the things you trust in, God says, "***Cursed are you!***" For one thing, they will all fail you. The things of this world our own sinful flesh will all fail us. They won't last forever; they'll die with us, and then what? Will they help us in the life of the world to come? No! Jesus said, "***Seek first the kingdom of God***" (Matthew 6:33). Not as a last resort, but first!

Ancient Greek historian Herodotus once said of Egypt that it was the gift of the Nile. Without the Nile, there would be no pyramids, no tombs, no treasures, no temples, no pharaohs like Ramses or Tutankhamen. Egypt would be like any other place in the Sahara Desert of northern Africa. But since the Nile flows year round, and since Egypt was not dependent on rain, droughts were no issue in Egypt.

The Nile flooded every year from the snowmelts thousands of miles upstream in the highlands of Ethiopia and Uganda, and those floods deposited silt to enrich the soil of Egypt. But go just a mile away from the Nile, beyond the reach of the floods or irrigation, and the desert and brown sand are immediate.

Now where would you want to plant your crop? In the desert or by the Nile? The answer is obvious. So, it's likewise obvious whether we should trust in the desert of our own strength or trust in the Lord, who waters us that we may prosper and grow in his green pastures (Jeremiah 17:8).

Cursed are the ones who rely on the world and self! Not only will they fail, but when we rely on the world and ourselves we have not turned to the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Turning from the Lord means we have despised and neglected the Lord. We have sought help only in ourselves. Will that be enough on the Last Day? When we stand before the Lord, who will our help be? Ourselves? Our text is clear, ***“Cursed is the man who trusts in man”*** (v 5).

In contrast, ***“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord”*** (v 7), for the Lord only is able to prosper and protect us. He is the one who will give us full life now and eternally. Not only will all others disappoint and fail us, but our turning to others is really a turning from the Lord.

Trusting in the Lord is like being planted by an ever-flowing river of water, like a palm tree next to the Nile River in Egypt. It doesn't matter if it doesn't rain; there's always water. But go just a mile from the Nile and there's no vegetation at all because there is no water. So where would you want to be planted? Or where would you plant your crop? By the Nile or in the desert? So, it is with trust in the Lord. Where would you rather be planted?

That is, in whom do we trust? We are quick to say, “the Lord,” but do we? We might confess “Well, not at first, but if all else fails, I've got the Lord to fall back on.” We wouldn't like to be anyone's second or third or last choice, would we? How do you think that attitude reflects on our trust in the Lord?

God rightly judges those who trust in themselves and is right to condemn them. We deserve what we would get.

We deserve to be parched, to wither and to die, because we have not trusted in our loving God, who says, ***“Come unto me, and I will give rest; I will give you life.”***

We have failed to trust in the Lord; we have failed to seek him first. But there is one who did all things well, who trusted in the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind. That is our Lord Jesus. He trusted his heavenly Father with all his life. In the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus trusted the Word of the Lord to take care of him and his life. And when he died on the cross, parched and thirsty, not because of any sin in him but rather for us and for our salvation, Jesus still said even then, ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”*** (Luke 23:46).

Jesus suffered on the cross all the curses we deserve and in their place gives us all the blessings we have not earned. He poured out his life that we may have life from him, from his body and from his blood. When Jesus rose from the dead, he breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to preach the good news of forgiveness of sins. And the same Holy Spirit is ours also.

So, let us repent of our sin of not trusting in the Lord and trusting in ourself. Believe the incredibly wonderful good news that our sin of mistrust and lack of trust, and trust in yourself, is forgiven and paid for on the cross by Jesus. Know that life, true life, life never failing, comes from God. Stay connected to him, for he is our life and salvation and will prosper our lives and growth for his purposes. He will lead us to streams of living water and green pastures in the house of the Lord forever. Blessed is the man, Jesus, who trusted in the Lord. Blessed are you who trust in the Lord Jesus.

Amen