

Do Not Be Afraid . . . Send Out Your Roots by the Stream!

Introduction

Do Not Be Afraid . . .

- A. For those of you tuning in with us for the first time, welcome! Let me quickly catch you up to speed. We've been in a series since the shelter-in-place order began entitled "Do Not Be Afraid . . ." In this series we've been dropping into texts all throughout the Scripture, Old and New Testaments, where this idea of not being afraid shows up.
1. The goal is to try to help us navigate the choppy waters of recent days. We're all a bit more prone to panic and anxiety in the face of this pandemic with all its implications.
- B. So this morning we're going to be in [Jer 17:5-8](#). It's a text we briefly looked at a while back when I was introducing DNA Groups, but we'll come at it a bit differently here today.

The Text

⁵ Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. ⁶ He is 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.

⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. ⁸ 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." ([Jer 17:5-8](#))

Stable Saints and Fruitful Trees

- A. You can see right away, I imagine, how this text relates to our sermon series, and why I may have chosen it for this morning. The prophet Jeremiah paints this picture for us of two trees, and we understand that they represent two kinds of people:
1. The first stands for those who trust in the resources and ingenuity of man, and hence they become unstable and unfruitful.
 2. And the second stands for those who trust in the Lord, and therefore they are secure and fruitful come what may, and hear this: they "[do] not fear" and they "[are] not anxious" ([v. 8](#)). . . even when all around them seems to be coming undone!
- B. That's what I want for you in this time! That's what I want for me in this time! I want to be a stable saint even when the world starts shaking. I want to be a fruitful tree even when the rain stops falling. I want to be at peace and an agent of peace even in the midst of a pandemic.
1. Don't you want that? I know you do. So how do we get it?!
- C. Well, that's what this text is all about. I'm going to organize my thoughts here this morning under two headings in particular: (1) Trees in the Desert; and (2) Finding the Fountain.

(1) Trees in the Desert

Two Trees and Three Aspects

- A. For this first piece I simply want to compare and contrast these two trees Jeremiah describes. And we'll see what they have to teach us about ourselves—why we do the things we do, feel the things we feel, struggle with the things we struggle with, and so on.
- B. And here's the way we're going to do this. It seems to me that in the way God describes these trees, three aspects are emphasized in particular.
 - 1. Our attention is drawn to the (1) Deeper Roots, (2) Inner Condition, and (3) Outer Production of each of these trees.
 - a. So we're going to consider these aspects one at a time and identify the difference between the two trees with regards to them.

Aspect #1: The Deeper Roots

- A. Here we discuss the most fundamental difference between the two trees, and it has to do with where they set their roots—or in human terms: where we set our hearts, where we place our trust. This aspect is that which clearly the Lord wishes to emphasize most strongly, for He opens both descriptions with a focus on it.
 - 1. So for the first tree: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord” (v. 5).
 - 2. And of the second: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord” (v. 7). And in v. 8 we see this put for us in pictorial form: “He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream . . .”
- B. Both trees find themselves in hard times it would seem. The one is spoken of as being in the “desert”. The other is spoken of as having to withstand severe “heat” and “drought”.
 - 1. But for the first there is a turning away from the Lord and a placing of trust, as we've said, in the resources and ingenuity of man.
 - 2. And for the second there is a turning towards the Lord and a deepening reliance upon Him.
- C. And so here we come to our first point of application. And I can get at it by asking a few simple but probing questions:
 - 1. Where is your heart right now?
 - 2. What are you trusting in?
 - 3. Where are you attempting to find your strength and refuge?
 - 4. Where are you sending out your roots?
 - 5. In what are you placing your hope?
 - 6. When the heat and drought and the desert come, where do you run for help?

- D. These are very poignant questions—always deeply relevant, especially so now with the world in the state that it’s in. So how would you answer? Where has your heart been?
- E. And in case you’re wondering what it might look like to be that tree trusting in man and making flesh his strength, let me at least give you a few examples:
1. It might look like, now that all of this has gone down, you’re watching the news way more than you’re reading your Bible or praying. You’re sucked into what’s happening and worried about it and waiting and hoping the scientists and the politicians will fix it.
 2. It might look like, now as you’re watching the stock market plummet, you’re just freaking out and reading the papers and the blogs and trying to figure out what your next move should be to try to salvage your portfolio. I don’t have time to read the Bible and pray (frankly, that just feels irrelevant right now), I’ve got to be reading the Wall Street Journal and making changes and making money.
 3. It might look like maybe you’ve been trying to find some semblance of comfort or peace in food, or drink, or exercise, or entertainment, or pornography. You probably know you’re just numbing it, but it feels nice momentarily. “Why did I just jam the 5th donut in my face? Well, it’s because I hate my life right now and this makes it feel a little less unpleasant.”
- F. You get the idea . . .
1. The first tree, when the heat comes, turns to man and created things, scrambles with self-effort and self-reliance—he sends out the roots of his heart across the dust and dirt of this world.
 2. The second tree turns to God. “[He] trusts in the Lord, [his] trust is the Lord” (v. 7). This man sends out the roots of his heart into the satisfying streams of the Almighty.
 - a. Like David in [Psa 62](#), when he found himself pressed in on all sides, yet still he cries out: “⁵ For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷ On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. [And then he turns to us . . .] ⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us” (vv. 5–8). Don’t go anywhere else!
- G. Make no mistake brothers and sisters, deciding in times of trial, to turn from flesh towards God is an act of all-out war. And you will feel it. It is not easy to rip the roots of our hearts out from worldly soils and settle them deeply into God.
1. When you see a stable saint, a fruitful tree, an agent of peace, what you may not realize is that underneath all of that is an embattled and war-torn spiritual soldier. Beneath all of the stability and the fruit and the peace is a person brutally engaged in this holy war of the heart.
 - a. It’s what Paul refers to as the fight for faith ([1 Tim 6:12](#); [2 Tim 4:7](#)).

- H. It all starts here. This is the deepest dividing line between tree one and tree two. The rest, as we'll see, just follows out from here . . .

Aspect #2: The Inner Condition

- A. Admittedly this is not brought out as clearly in the first tree, but it most certainly is in the second. And I think we are meant to circle back with some of this and let it influence our understanding of the first.
1. Let me explain what I mean. By "Inner Condition" now I am no longer talking about what the heart is trusting in—I'm talking about how the heart is doing, how your heart is feeling, what's going on inside, what's the current state of your soul.
- B. So in latter part of v. 8 we're told how this second tree is doing, this person that's turning in trust to the Lord: "He . . . does not fear when heat comes . . . [he] is not anxious in the year of drought . . ."
1. In other words, there's a strange peace that characterizes this person even in the hardest of times. It's not inner turmoil, fear, and anxiety. It's rest and freedom from the rush of things. There's a calmness in it all.
- C. And as I said, I think by extension we are supposed to infer that this is certainly not the case with the first tree—the person who is trusting in man and the stuff of this world to get him out of trouble. There would be a person marked by fear and marked by anxiety. There's a panic and a restlessness to them.
1. Turning from God, seemed a good idea at first—a way to fix matters quickly, take it into your own hands. But if you've ever tried this you know it soon gives way to a certain unexpected anxiety and even dread.
 - a. You can't keep it up. You're unable to shoulder the weight of it. You start to crack and crumble. God never intended you to have to figure things out on your own, yet in our pride still we try.
- D. I thought of that old Grecian myth about Atlas, the Titan who led his people in a war against the Olympian gods in an effort to take control of the heavens. But he loses and, instead of gaining control of the heavens, he is punished by Zeus with the task of bearing on his shoulders the full weight of the heavens. He's got to hold it all up.
1. And this is what happens when we try to take control of what is God's, when we refuse to turn to Him and instead try to go about things our way. We do it because it seems to promise us great reward and freedom and things. But we end up even more greatly burdened and broken.
- E. This really is precisely what we see happen with Adam and Eve in the garden.
1. "The fruit of the tree God forbid, it will make you wise. He knows it will make you like god. He's holding back on you. Reach out and take it." So they do.

- a. Their hearts turn from God to something else because they think it will get them what they want. But it only makes things worse. Immediately, guilt and shame, fear and anxiety, break in: *“I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, . . . and I hid myself”* (Gen 3:10).
- F. And some of us may be right there with Adam, right there with Atlas, right there with this first tree—*anxious and afraid, no calm, no peace*. And we wonder why. We wonder what that’s all about.
 - 1. And our text, this word picture, makes it so plain. It’s because our hearts are turning from God. And when the heart turns from God, the heart breaks.
- G. It really is true what Augustine famously said so many years ago after all his many escapades and turning to this and that the other thing for satisfaction and things unsuccessfully: *“You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You”* (Confessions 1.1.1.).

Aspect #3: The Outer Production

- A. By *“Outer Production”* here I am referring to the idea of produce—that fruit (or not) which each of these two trees produces. This is the stuff hanging from the branches of a person’s life, the behavior, the attitudes and actions. And such things are organically connected to the first two aspects.
- B. Of the first tree—the one turning from God, and trusting in man, and characterized by fear and anxiety and instability—there is, unsurprisingly, no good harvest that comes.
 - 1. The exact description is there in v. 6: *“He is 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.”* There’s no fruit here.
- C. And this, of course, is meant to be contrasted with the production of the second tree, which is quite the opposite. Here we see that the one who’s roots are settled deep in the Lord, who’s therefore characterized by peace and a marked restfulness, will also then bear much good fruit in and out of season—or, in other words, even in the hardest of times.
 - 1. So we read in v. 8: *“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.”*
- D. I thought of Gal 5 at this point where Paul outlines for us in many ways what I think the produce of these two kinds of trees might entail.
- E. Regarding the first tree, Paul speaks of what he calls *“the works of the flesh”* (v. 19).
 - 1. And you’ve got to note that. Those who in times of heat and drought put their trust in man, will therefore naturally produce the works of the flesh. The whole thing is characterized by the sweat and burden of human effort.

2. And here are the things he outlines: “¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (vv. 19–21).
 - a. When you turn from God and trust in yourself, and you’ve got that fear and anxiety because it’s on your shoulders, of course it’s going to lead to things like enmity and strife and jealousy and fits of anger and all of this. Because it’s up to you. You’re not able to love anyone other than yourself. They are a threat to you and your security and joy.
- F. But then Paul shifts gears in v. 22 and he begins to speak of people like this second tree, and he starts talking about he calls “the fruit of the Spirit . . .”
1. And isn’t that just beautiful in contrast with the works of the flesh—the labor, the burden, the sweat that just gets you nowhere but worse—he talks now of fruit, the fruit that naturally even “peacefully” as the author of Hebrews qualifies it (Heb 12:11), grows and develops on the branches of a person’s life.
 - a. Who doesn’t love fruit? If we ever get off this shelter-in-place order one of the things I can’t wait to do is take my family over to one of those farms in Watsonville and pick some fresh summer strawberries and whatever else they have in season. There’s something sweet about it.
 - i. And there’ll be something sweet about your life too if you’re trusting in and finding your rest in God.
 2. But, as he did with the works of the flesh, Paul then goes out to outline these fruits further for us: “²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,^{23a} gentleness, self-control . . .” (vv. 22–23a).
 - a. And you see how this fits together, right? You don’t have to engage the works of the flesh, cut people down, divide, compete, etc. You can love and be patient and kind and good because you know God has you.
 - i. And so even when stuff is going horribly wrong in your life, again, “it does not cease to bear fruit” (v. 8b). Let me tell you, sometimes in the hottest of deserts you’ll meet the sweetest of saints! Have you met one of those? Don’t you want to be one of those?!

(2) Finding the Fountain

The Stream and the Fountain

- A. You’ll notice, as we’ve been saying, that the deepest and most fundamental difference between these two trees is that one has its roots settled in God and the other doesn’t.

1. And, of course, God is pictured here as this “stream” (v. 8) that’s always flowing and you can tap into it even in times of drought and dryness.
- B. And a few verses later God actually goes a bit further with this idea and refers to Himself as “the fountain of living water” (v. 13).
1. It’s an amazing image! One that harkens back to [Jer 2:12-13](#)—a pretty famous passage, where God rebuking Israel for her idolatry says: “¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”
 - a. This is really just another way of getting at precisely the same sort of thing He’s getting at in our text in [Jer 17](#). You’re trying to get water from man-made sources, trying to drink from the cisterns of this world, and it’s not working. You need God!

Two Transformational Encounters

- A. And what’s interesting is that Jesus Himself will actually pick up this image of living water and refer to it even in His own ministry. He goes about inviting people to come and drink and find this living water through relationship with Him.
- B. Now, there are two places in particular where we see this—both in John’s gospel, and in both instances we meet an individual who responds to that call and is significantly transformed.
1. Jesus helps them make the shift, as it were, from the first tree to the second—from the fruitless, anxious, shallow-rooted tree, to the tree that’s stable, at peace, and full of good fruit.
 - a. And I wanted you to see this, because it’s what He wants to do with us!

Transformation Encounter#1: The Woman at the Well

- A. Now, obviously, I can only summarize these two stories, but the first is found in [John 4](#), and many of you are probably well familiar with it. It’s the story of the woman at the well.
1. There we meet this lady who’s just lost herself along the way. She’s been living a life of sin. We come to realize she’s been going from man to man to man, no doubt trying to fill what’s empty in her, fix what’s broken in her. But it’s just made it worse.
 2. And she comes out to this well with her jar in the heat of the day at a time when most of the other ladies and things would be in their homes, so she wouldn’t have to hear their gossip and slandering (you see how when you’re living in sin, you’re always having to bob and weave, there’s fear and anxiety and angst).
 3. And there she meets Jesus. And Jesus loves her, and He knows she’s thirsty, and He wants to help. So He says listen: “If you ask Me, I will give you living water” (v. 10).
 4. And at this point she doesn’t get it. She thinks He’s talking about literal water from the well right there. So He tries again: “¹³ Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water

that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (vv. 13–14).

5. She still doesn’t get it. So He cuts to the point. And He starts talking to her about her relationships and how she’s been trying to find water there but coming up dry.
 6. And then suddenly it makes sense. “We’re talking about my heart, and where these roots are going. We’re talking about the mess I’ve made of my life. And we’re talking about a God who loves me still and would accept me even in this place and wants me to turn to Him in trust and find my satisfaction and my rest in Him.”
 7. She gets it. She’s transformed. And she just leaves her water jar there at the well. “I don’t need to drink from the broken cisterns of this world! I have God!”
 8. And she runs back to town. She doesn’t care who sees her now. And she goes about telling everyone of the One she’s found—or, perhaps better, about the One who’s found her.
- B. So, you see, it’s a transformational encounter. She’s a different tree—the roots of her heart are settled in a different place, the inner condition of her soul marked by peace, there’s good fruit now emerging in her attitudes and actions.

Transformational Encounter #2: The Ruler of the Jews

- A. The second story comes in [John 7](#). And the context is different now. It’s the Feast of Tabernacles—a big religious celebration for the Jews, remembering the time God led Israel through the wilderness to the Promised Land.
- B. So the interesting thing is, where in [John 4](#) He’s speaking to a Samaritan sinner about living water, now He’s with these Jewish religious folks.
1. This is a different kind of sinner, a different kind of fruitless tree. They look good on the outside. The woman at the well it was clear she was off. But these guys are in church, saying their prayers, memorizing their Bibles, and things.
 - a. But a lot of them are doing it for the wrong reasons. Their hearts are still set in the wrong place. It’s still self-reliance, self-righteousness, getting others to see them, admire them. It’s the same sinful stuff but now set on a religious stage.
 - i. It’s still the works of the flesh. And that’s about to come out in moment . . .
- C. Jesus rolls up on their celebration and in [John 7:37-38](#) we read this: “³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’”
1. He sees these religious crowds as needing water just as much as that woman at the well. “You guys are celebrating the time God provided for you in the wilderness, like when Moses struck the rock and water poured out for you to drink. Well, I’m telling you I’m that rock, and soon I’ll be struck by the rod of God for your sin, and from my wounds, streams of living water will flow. Come and drink!”
- D. One would think the religious leaders might be excited about such a declaration. But they’re furious. They’re ready to arrest and even kill Him. Why?

1. Well, because of everything Paul listed back in [Gal 5](#). Jealousy, envy, rivalry. Jesus is getting all this attention. They wanted that. Their religion isn't about God, it's been about them. And Jesus is threatening that. So they're anxious and they're angry.
- E. But there's one man among the religious leaders here that feels otherwise. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews as he's called. And he speaks up, calling for patience and kindness to be shown to Jesus. Fruits of the Spirit. Why? How?
1. Well, you see Jesus had already met with Him on a previous occasion: [John 3](#).
 2. And He told him about being born again from above by the Spirit of God, and He told Him how God so loved the world that He gave His son that whoever might believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life.
 3. And it seems something has changed in this man. He got it. "It's not about my self-wrought righteousness, my empty religion, trying to keep up with it all. It's about Him, His righteousness, His sacrifice, His grace, His Spirit."
 4. So Nicodemus has tasted something of this living water. The roots of his heart are spreading out into it. And so there's fruit now. Instead of animosity and anger and self-righteousness, there's peace and love.
- F. And it's amazing. He shows up again one more time, later in [John 19:39](#) when they're burying Jesus. And we're told that he brings with him 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes to be used as burial perfume.
1. One commentator remarks on the massive quantity here and says such an amount would be "sufficient for a royal burial" (TNTC). In other words, Nicodemus is treating Jesus like a King . . . His King!

Two Ways . . . Both Invited!

- A. So what we see here is that there's more than one way to be that first tree—trusting in yourself, trusting in man, anxious, afraid, producing the works of the flesh.
1. You can do it by pursuing all manner of worldly sin, like that woman at the well. Or you can do it by pursuing religion in a self-reliant, smug, self-righteous way, like Nicodemus used to. Both are exhausting, both leave you empty.
 - a. But here's the beautiful thing: Both are invited by Jesus to come to the fountain of living water and drink!
- B. And the invitation is extended now to you.
1. Are you thirsty? Are you trying to send out your roots into all manner of things, but it's not panning out? You're anxious, weighed down, angry and jealous, broken inside and out?
 - a. Let me encourage you: Send out your roots by the stream. Come to Jesus even now and drink!