

A Tree Planted by Water

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[0 : 00] Okay, this morning we're going to look back at the passage that Mary read for us in Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 17, and one section of that chapter, I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment.

But I guess in a sense the question that I would like us all to ask ourselves this morning, it's a very basic question, is who are you? Who am I?

Okay, it's deep. A philosophical question maybe for a Sunday morning. But I just wonder about that, it's a really important question that we need to ask ourselves, because I would ask a secondary question to that is, what's your public profile?

What's your persona? And the two can be different, you know? And maybe that particularly is a very relevant question too, if you're a young person, if you're a fresher, if you're coming down, leaving home for the first time, and you're finding yourself in a completely new circle of friends, maybe you're here for work, it may not be that you are, and obviously a lot of you aren't.

But nonetheless, it's a good question for us all to ask, you know, what is our public persona? What are we like in public with other people? And yet, who are we ultimately, what are we like in and of ourselves?

[1 : 28] You know, if you're coming into a new community at any level, it's tough, and it's tough being a Christian particularly, I think. It's not particularly populist to be a Christian, and or a significant life choice as it were.

So sometimes we can have a public persona that hides that, because we may be a little bit embarrassed about it all. But even church can be a difficult place for us, not just for the first time, but maybe for the hundred and fourth time in church.

It can be a tough place. Church can be a place with a lot of judgment going on. It can be a place where it's easy to cover up what we're really like or what we really feel, it can be a place where we try to impress a lot of the time.

And so it might be our public persona in church. It's very different from what we are with others or indeed privately in our own lives. And the thing is that God isn't interested in that at all, really. He's not interested in our public persona as our identity. He's much, much more significantly interested in our character, in what we are on the inside, as it were, what we are in our hearts.

[2 : 47] And that really brings us to a key truth of the Christian gospel in chapter 17 of this chapter in verse 9, the summary God makes of the heart.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? And so the key to the Christian message is recognizing the need of our heart, becoming whole and recognizing that instead of just dying inside, which ultimately we all are without Jesus Christ, it's about living in from the inside out, which is the message of the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ.

Who comes to make us new from the inside out, it doesn't work from the outside in, which is so often how we work. We work from the outside thinking it might be able to change us in the inside. God acts differently and that's the key to life. So what we're going to do over the next number of weeks on a Sunday morning is to begin a series on discipleship, really getting to the heart of your matter, okay?

Knowing, looking at and thinking about where our priorities should lie, because there are many, many competing priorities in our lives and our responsibility as a church is to focus your heart on Jesus Christ and on the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and discipling one another and encouraging one another along that way because we're prone to wander.

[4 : 16] And so discipleship, there's a discipleship team within the church who are helping to develop and encourage a clear vision for church involvement in discipleship through city groups,

through one to one, through being rooted and living in Christ.

Now they're going to have a booklet which will help with that and the front of that will look something like what's coming up on the screen hopefully. Yes, there you go, rooted and living in Christ. And that's that we've got a picture there of the visual picture of the verbal picture that you're giving in Jeremiah 17. Keep that in your mind, even if you're not an imaginative person, it's a great picture to keep in your mind.

So what we have in the Old Testament context here in Jeremiah 17 is the Old Testament people of God having turned away from their relationship with God because they relegated God and the significance of God in their lives.

They said that God didn't matter and they started trusting in themselves. God was insignificant, became insignificant to them even though they were the people of God and they wandered, they drifted far from God as a result.

[5 : 31] They became exiled from Him physically, geographically, been taken out of the Promised Land and ending up in Babylon. They'd got it all wrong.

And what we have here is God reminding them a fantastic picture of reminding them what it means to trust in God, what true following God looks like and what discipleship looks like.

And so in this picture which we're going to look at today, it speaks about what God, it gives us a picture of God Himself and it gives us a picture of us and what healthy faith in Him looks like.

And that's what we're going to look at as a way of introduction to this discipleship series this morning. Two pictures then that were given, one of us and one of God.

And the one of God is that He is like living water. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, verse 7, who trusts in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream.

[6 : 30] Water is the vital source of life, isn't it? And the Bible uses the image and the illustration of water a lot in throughout its pages and it's simply a fundamental part of life.

I think over 60% of the body is made up of water. Its life's great ingredient. Water's hugely significant.

No water, no life to change the kind of image of the Bob Marley song. No water, no life. It's something we don't value terribly much, I don't think, to the same degree in the West because it runs so freely and we can get out of our taps.

It's cheap and plentiful and it's a bit boring and dull. We would maybe far rather Coke Zero than water. But it's only when it's scarce that we truly value.

Even in our country, we see occasions when water becomes scarce and how quickly life becomes problematic and difficult for us. And in the desert, in the type of community and the type of geographical landscape that the people of God were used to, it was absolutely, clearly a matter of life and death.

[7 : 49] And so water is used as an illustration of the character of God as the source of life, as the wellspring of life, as the one who nourishes, who's active, who's powerful, mysterious, gentle, sweet and satisfying.

And that's the picture, that's the image we're given of who God is, the source of life. We know Jesus took on that image and that picture himself when he spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4.30.

I'm not sure if I've got a... did I put that up? Yeah. In John 4, verse 13, Jesus said, "There are everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again." That's actually probably the wrong... it should be, but he who drinks the water that I give him will live... will live for eternal life.

And so there's that reality that Jesus was speaking of himself as the one who is living water. And then on the... what I read at the beginning of the service as they call to worship, spoke about Jesus who on that last and great day of the feast spoke about himself, "If anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink.' And he takes on that great image of being living water.

Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from him." And of course, he goes on to explain that that is also the Holy Spirit living in us.

[9 : 18] And the Bible ends with Revelation 22, which is the city with the river of life flowing from it and the picture of God being at the center of this new heavens and new earth.

So we have a picture of God as living water, okay? And then we have a picture of this God who is living water offering us blessing. Blessed is the man, blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord. And blessing, biblically, is simply a word which speaks about abundant life and the favor of God, well-being from God, God's shalom, God's peace.

And it is always related to what it means to be fully human, to be fully human is to be known by God and loved by Him and to be found in Him.

That's where the blessing comes. That's where abundant life comes. That is where our whole well-being as a human person comes from.

[10:23] And the challenge is we often look for blessing in different places to God. We look for wholeness and we look for meaning and direction and ultimate satisfaction in different things, whether it be in pleasure or in relationships with friends or lovers.

If it's in family or career or wealth or, I say, politics, that's your hope, you're currently in deep trouble, the way things are.

Or in a cause for which to live, and none of these things are insignificant, but none of them can deliver what God promises in His desire to bless us.

He says, only in Him can we find this satisfaction and peace, well-being and His shalom through Jesus Christ. Everything else goes away in the end, okay?

So there's my quote from Nine Inches Nails, the song that Johnny Cash made probably popularized, what have I become my sweetest friend?

[11:31] Everyone I know goes away in the end, or everything I know goes away in the end. And there's this place where the promise is shattered ultimately and where the hope in which we have put all our energies and trust fails to provide what we're looking for.

And God is saying, the only place of shalom, the only place of blessing for us as human beings is in Him, as we trust in the Lord.

And that's the challenge of the gospel, that's the offer that goes out from Jesus Christ, that being in the Lord is the only place of ultimate blessing and of ultimate wholeness and peace in this life and life to come.

So God is illustrated here as living water as a stream, as water. What about us? And the picture here is of the person who trusts in the Lord.

And the picture is that we are a tree, okay? He is living water and we are a tree. And there's various aspects of that illustration that apply to us in our lives as Christians, which I want to focus on for a few minutes.

[12:51] The first is that we are planted, okay? We are planted, verse 8 says, is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots in the stream. And that planting is just a great picture of solidity, of being focused in trusting our lives and then trusting our lives into Him.

Being trusting, and twice it says, in one sentence, and always when God repeats Himself, it's important, He says, bless it is the man who trusts in the Lord, who trusts in the Lord.

And that's really what, that's the verbal truth of the picture of being planted. It's a fixed mindset that He's looking for the believer to have.

This is where I stand, I can do no other, the famous words of Luther and a diet of worms in Germany.

That He needed, He couldn't do anything else but stick with the God in whom He trusts. It's a life or death matter.

[13:58] It was so significant for Him. There was nothing else for it. You know, Joshua said, as for me in my house, we will serve the Lord. It didn't matter what was going on around Him.

There was this, He was planted in the Lord and in trusting in the Lord. And there's that security of being in one place. You know, you know if you get, I think I've probably said this picture, used this before, but sometimes when you go to a place and there's a scenery and then you go back to a place 10 years later and lots of things have changed.

But maybe there's a tree in that picture that hasn't moved at all. And you know, lots of buildings might have gone around about it, but there's a tree that's just there and it hasn't changed that much, a big mature oak tree or something.

And there's this picture of it being, plant, you know, the trees. Trees don't, they don't move location. You know, they don't grab up the roots and head off somewhere else. There's this something about security about planting.

You know, as a kid, you love climbing trees because they were secure and it's great fun to climb trees. And there's a security there in the midst of whatever's happening around about planted.

[15:08] And that picture is that God is our foundation and God is the one in whom we trust. And our mindset is always fixed on our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ because we know Him and we love

Him and we recognize what He's done.

Colossians 3 verses 2 and 3 says, set your mind on things that are above, non-things that are there for you. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. It's a mindset.

It's a decision that we are planted and that is where we will be. It doesn't mean we have all the answers. It doesn't mean that things are going to go swimmingly for us. It doesn't mean things are easy, but we know He is good.

We have experienced His grace and we have nowhere else to go. We have nowhere else to go because He is dependable and strong. We are not for moving.

We are planted in that position of trusting in the Lord. We're planted. We also have strong roots and it's a really important reality for us.

[16:12] He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots to the stream. And that's a really great picture that I hope you can keep in your mind for what it means to be in relationship with Jesus Christ as a Christian.

In other words, it's the unseen part of our lives. I started by talking about our persona and what we are in private. This is what we are in private. This is what happens under the ground.

You don't see the direction and the roots heading towards the living water, but there's this great intentionality for the tree and heading towards the water.

And this is a great picture of who we are and what we are in private as Christians. What our heart is like, what direction we're in, what our character is, not what we look like to other people, not what we are in public, not our profile, but rather where our hearts lie, what direction our hearts are in, where we are sending our hearts for nourishment, for energy and for beauty.

In verse 10, there's this linking of the heart and the mind. So it's what we're thinking. It's what inhabits our thought life and what direction our thought life is and what is it that energizes us.

[17:35] You know, if you're struggling today with your faith, if you're struggling with your Christian walk with God, you have to ask that question, what are you like, what am I like in private? What am I like when I'm not in church?

What direction is the unseen part of my life heading in? To whom do I go for, for nourishment and energy and beauty? What grips you inside that nobody else sees?

What is not your profile, but what are you in your heart? It's about character, not about gifting. It's about what you are inside that nobody else necessarily knows.

So very often, we're wanting to get to the top of the tree. God is interested in the roots of our lives, what we're like underneath the profile we have.

And that drives us again towards the Lord God because we can't change what we are inside in and of ourselves.

[18:38] We can't act on the outside and think, well, I can just change on the inside because God says the heart is deceitful above all things and we can't do it. We have in the energy, we have in the ability, we have in the quality to do that.

We can't deal ultimately with the hatred or the anger, the self-obsessions, the insecurities, the motives and the idols. We can't do it. We can't be free.

And Jesus says, without me, you can't do nothing. You know, we have that on one of the notice boards down in the office in the church. We can't, you know, I am the vine, you are the branches, without me, you can't do nothing.

And there's that, that's hugely significant that in our lives we recognize where we are getting our energy and strength and direction and thoughts and character from at our roots intentionally reaching out to the living water.

In other words, are we in constant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Nobody else sees us. It's not about coming to church at this point. It's not about just what we are on the outside.

[19:48] It's about that character formation that nobody sees because we can't go anywhere else to find what He alone gives us, the living water and the Spirit of God to change us.

So planted strong roots, evergreen. He speaks about that, doesn't fear when heat comes for its leaves remain green.

And that's a great picture again. The picture in the Bible is of the heat and the drought being circumstances that are difficult and bad, trouble.

When trouble comes in our lives, in relationships, or in church, or in our health, or whatever happens, that is when where our roots are is exposed.

That's when it matters. It's not really when things are great. It's when drought comes. The tree that's planted by the root whose roots are intentionally going to living water will be evergreen because it's receiving life from the water, even in drought.

[20 : 53] And that's a huge and significant reality for us in our Christian lives. When drought comes in our Christian lives, where are our roots?

Where are we finding our life and our energy? Where are we finding our relationship? Is it in Christ? Or is it when drought comes, we blame Christ and we blame God.

It gives it often we'll reveal where our roots lie and where our nourishment and our energy and our relationship comes from. It reveals whether we understand the cross and why Jesus died.

It reveals whether we understand grace and our hearts and suffering and hope because as we come to know Him through our roots, being energized in relationship with Him in the privacy of prayer and Bible reading in our own lives, then we hear Him and we know Him and He says, don't be afraid.

I love you. I'm with you. You might not understand, but these things will expose and deepen your faith and trust if you allow them in times of drought, evergreen.

[22 : 00] The fourth thing is fruitful. Leaves will remain and these two are kind of linked again, I guess, does not and in times of drought for it doesn't cease to bear fruit.

So the picture of the Christian and it's used throughout the Bible, whose roots, what they're like in private, what they're like in relationship with the living God who roots are intentionally finding their energy and life from Jesus Christ in prayer and in the Word is fruitful, whatever the circumstances. Now there's an interesting paradox here because you might think so far that I'm talking about a private personal Christian walk and that's all that matters.

All that matters is what you are under the surface, that your roots are in the right place all about a personal relationship with God and it's all about knowing Him, you know, no matter what is happening on the outside.

But paradoxically, while that is true, it doesn't lead to an insular private or individualistic Christian life.

[23 : 10] It's outward looking because we're fruit bearing, okay? And fruit bearing is all about sharing what we are with others, isn't it?

A fruit tree. A fruit tree is the most selfless organism in the world. It doesn't eat its own fruit. It exists to be beautiful and nourishing for others.

But it's selfish in terms of its roots, where it gets its nourishment and where it gets its life. But as it gets its life in Christ, it bears fruit even in drought.

And that therefore makes the Christian useful to everyone else. I spoke about the human body being about 50% water. Well, I think most fruit are actually 80 to 90% water.

So where the roots of the tree are, receiving water, is passed into the fruit. So it becomes refreshing and nourishing for those who eat it. And that's a great picture of the Christian life, as we are rooted and established in Jesus, we bear fruit which is good for other people because we are taking the life of the Holy Spirit in us and we are sharing it with others.

[24 : 27] So there's two things about this fruit. It's spiritually beautiful. We should be spiritually beautiful as Christians, okay? We should be great, and I don't mean this in terms of our looks, but in terms of our character, we should be beautiful to look at and we should smell good, okay?

We should have a pleasing aroma about us. Now, I'm not talking about the condition of our body or our ugly visage, which you might have if you're a preacher here.

I'm talking about a spiritual beauty, a beauty of character. It should be a lovely aroma. But I remember 40 years ago, okay, 40 years ago, 39 years ago I was 15, okay?

39 years ago I was 16, sorry. And we went on holiday to Canada and at one point we drove towards Niagara Falls from the north and we passed through a little village called Niagara by the lake.

Absolutely a dillock little place, full of peach and apple orchards. I can still smell them when I think about that place. I can still smell that unbelievable, beautiful smell going through Niagara by the lake.

[25 : 55] 40 years on. There's a powerful aroma that lingers with us and being rooted in Christ will make our character memorable for the gospel.

Not about show, it's not about impressing, it's not about deceiving. You know, there's nothing worse than going into a place and there's a fruit ball there and a beautiful looking apple and you go for it

and take a big bite and it's wax.

You don't get that so much now, but you used to get sort of bowls of false fruit. Why I'm not sure, I didn't have real fruit. But you know, it's not about a show, it's not about looking good on the outside. It's the great, what, God talks about the great fruit of the Spirit, doesn't He in Galatians 5? What are they? They love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. They're impossible to know and to show from the inside out unless we are rooted and dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit because we are spiritually dead without Him and we need to be beautiful, we need Him.

[27 : 09] And then we will see that as we are rooted in Christ in our lives day to day, in the privacy and in the mind, in the mind map that is ours and in what makes us us, we will then become nourishing for others.

We become fruitful and nourish others because interestingly the gospel, the core of the gospel and the core of living as a Christian is being rooted in God, that is loving God and loving one another, that is fruit, that's the fruit.

So it's the both ends of the tree. So the Ten Commandments are summarized loving God with all your heart, soul, strength, mind and your neighbour as yourself, it's the tree. It's the root, it's going to Christ for salvation and it's the fruit which is loving others.

Now, I've got, when I left my previous congregation nearly 20 years ago, a lady in the congregation had embroidered, I tried to get it on the screens in a photograph but it didn't work, embroidered the one and others of the New Testament, okay?

You can't really see, you can look at it later if you want. Embroidered is that right word? No, can't remember, whatever that is. She did it with needle and thread, all the one and others in the New Testament and that really is what the fruit bearing is all about, it's the, look at them.

[28 : 46] Be devoted, honour one another, live in harmony, stop passing judgment, accept one another, instruct one another, serve one another, don't bite and devour, don't provoke one another, don't envy, carry one another's burdens, be kind and compassionate, forgive one another, submit, encourage, spur on, offer hospitality, don't slander, don't grumble, confess your sins, pray for, fellowship with, wash one another's feet, encourage one another, greet one another with a holy kiss, okay?

We might not do the holy kiss but we'll do this what it means. It's a giving and loving of one another. That's the fruit of the Spirit, that is the giving of one another and that's what we're encouraged to be and to do as we bear fruit within the gospel, bearing fruit.

And that is not something we just do with our friends, okay? It's something we do in the context of the body of Christ, in the context of the church and beyond.

And I know it's so easy to want to give up on the church. I know that absolutely and I'm pleading with you not to. Why? Because it's so great?

No. But because you need it. It's God's appointed means of you being nourished, of you belonging and of family and of receiving the fruit and being nourished by the beauty and the fruit of other Christians in their lives.

[30 : 14] But also because we need you, we in the church need you. You know, we live in a generation where the church doesn't matter and we buy into that.

But Jesus says, you need the church and the church says we need you. And that's really the core of all the discipleship that we're hoping to do, is that we support one another.

We bear fruit for one another. We encourage one another because we encourage all of us to be rooted in Christ and accountable to one another spiritually for that.

So in St. Columbus, I think the core of what, very often people will come to a church and a new church and they'll say, what can I do? You know, how can you use my gifts?

And that's an absolutely legitimate question. But our fundamental and primary question is that we would rather you ask is, who can I be, rather than what can I do?

[31 : 15] Because the first is based on your gifts, which are from God. The second is based on your character. And your character is much more important, is much more fundamental. The gifts will look after themselves if your character is in the right place.

And so it's not about a persona, it's not about our gifts primarily. It's about our godly character, and godly character comes from being rooted in Jesus Christ underground, which no one else sees, that private devotional walk with God that you must have.

Don't just depend on the one hour on a Sunday, it's not of value on its own. So we're a tree. Lastly, very briefly, there's an alternative isn't there in verses five and six.

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. The alternative to being a tree is to being tumbleweed, spiritually tumbleweed, shrub in the desert.

You know the tumbleweed moment? The wind comes in the western, and the tumbleweed rolls like kind of round thing, and it rolls for ages. It's starved of life, of goodness and fruitfulness, it's just full of thorns.

[32 : 24] It doesn't get down to the living water, it hasn't any deep roots, so what happens is the tumbleweed just breaks off in the wind because it's rootless, and it's sharp and thorny, and what it does is it spreads its seeds that way as it drifts, it's unstable.

That's a great picture of us if we're not rooted in Christ. We're never really static enough to allow God to search our hearts.

We're not really solid enough to reveal our true self or to be accountable. We're drifting, we're always running, we've no time to stop, we're not sending our roots out to Christ.

At best we've got a nodding acquaintance with Him, and we're sowing discontent and disharmony in a way through what we do.

So when the drought comes in life, and drought always comes to us, always does, how do you respond? Do we respond with fruit or with thorns?

[33 : 26] Do we turn away from the Lord or do we turn to Him? Do you rely on your own inner strength or on human wisdom, or do you therefore blame God or give up or despair or grumble and badmouth God and others?

Or do you find even in times of drought, your roots are firmly established in Jesus Christ? So there are a thousand competing voices for you today, most of them come from within, but where are you going to stand?

And will you let us as a church help equip you and disciple you towards Christ? I think today might be for you the most important day of your life, because the decision you will make from here moving forward, to whom will you entrust your life and your heart and your future?

No one else can promise what Jesus Christ promises, peace, shalom, forgiveness, eternal life and fruitfulness even in times of drought.

And as a Christian, I would encourage you just to engrave that picture of the tree in your mind and that your spiritual beauty comes from what you are in private with the Lord, where the roots of your life are, the bits of your life and mind and thoughts that nobody else sees in Christ alone, you'll be able to nourish others and your character will be beautiful and refreshing for others.

[34 : 58] Even in all our failings and faults, can I encourage you to commit to giving your life to being one that loves God, where our roots are, and serving others with our fruitfulness.

Amen.