

Living Water

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Okay, for a short while this morning, I'm going to go back to the reading that we had in Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 17, which is a well-known verse or a well-known section to us here in the church, because it's one that we've looked at quite a lot, and it's giving some important truths for us to share.

Now, we've got water here at the front, which will be part of our service later on. We've warmed it up, so it's nice and warm for Sera, and I hope Sera will be prepared for that new experience for her to be taken in my arms and have water poured over her head.

I'm sure she has. I think Andy's been doing a couple of practices at home just to make sure she's not completely traumatised by that. But someone will be bringing Sophie and Sera back in a little while.

Now we know that fresh water, which obviously we use here, is a fantastic natural element, and it's a great element that God uses in the Bible to illustrate a little bit about who He is Himself and why we need Him.

Water really is a great thing, fresh water is a great thing. It's very much the source of our physical lives. Without water, without fresh water, we would die.

[1 : 34] It's as simple as that. It doesn't look like it. 60 to 70% of our bodies are made up of water, and it's what makes planet Earth so absolutely significant in the universe and unique among the billions of planets in the universe.

This fruitful, blossoming, healthy, glorious world, which is that way because of the water that makes it so unique.

And you see that when people are looking at different planets for any evidence of life. That's always water that they're looking for to see whether there is life on other planets.

And we know in our own lives and in our own society, but also in our own world, how important fresh water is to our health and to our hygiene and even to our prosperity.

And I know we take it in many ways. I'm sure I certainly know I take it for granted. But there are 785 million people in this world.

[2 : 46] That's one in 10 of the world's population who don't have clean water close to their homes, who are having to live with the reality of dirty water and the poverty that's so closely linked to that.

So while it's easy for us to take it for granted, we recognize the huge responsibility at a human level we have of making sure as much as possible that this world's population has clean water to allow for health.

I think sometimes for us it's kind of ordinary and even a bit dull because it flows out of our taps. It doesn't taste particularly great. Although maybe that's changing more.

I think the younger generation are much healthier when it comes to that and drink lots of clean water, which is great. Now in this chapter in Jeremiah, God gives us a picture, or he uses water as a picture to illustrate where our trust lies, whether we trust in God or whether we don't trust in God, whether our hope lies and where our fundamental reality lies in terms of whether we just live for ourselves and trust in ourselves or whether we are relying on God and on His strength in our lives. So it's this kind of competition sometimes as it were between, is it just trusting myself and in my own strength or do I trust in God?

[4 : 20] Really? Do people still trust in God? Is that not a sign of weakness rather than strength? But it's there to make us think really, and it's there for us as Christians because it was written, this passage was written to the Old Testament believers, to make us think again about who God is and how He views our lives and how He wants us to view our relationship with Him.

Because you know, if God is God and is as important as God must be, if He's God, okay, that's a very convoluted sentence. I'll say it again. If God is God and if He's as important as God must be if He's God, then it matters, doesn't it, what we think about Him?

It matters what He says in His word. And so we're going to look just for a few minutes at that before the baptism. Because the first section of that, there's two sections, talks about the person who doesn't trust in God is someone who is like a shrub or a bush in a desert place, okay?

And so he's basically saying, unbelief leaves us in a bad place. That picture of a, you know, you can imagine it, of a tree that are a bush that's barely surviving in the desert that is just not deeply rooted. You know the, I used this picture before here of tumbleweed, you know the old cowboy films that was tumbleweed growing. That's the kind of end result of this loosely rooted tree or bush that becomes tumbleweed in the desert.

[5 : 54] It's dry, it's isolated, it talks about these salt flats. Salt flats are hugely unfruitful places, uninhabitable places still in the world, dangerous and deadly.

And there's this picture of kind of isolation and vulnerability and being exposed to the elements in an unhealthy way. And Jeremiah, this Old Testament prophet, prophet of lamentation, he's often called, he brings this warning to the Old Testament believers, the people of God, God's Old Testament people who had all the privileges, who had all the knowledge, who have all the love, who had been rescued by God, who had been put in a beautiful land flowing with milk and honey and all these things, and who had been protected by God but who chose to run away from Him, who chose to turn their back on Him and to worship and serve idols and to worship and satisfy their own sinful desires without thinking about the God who rescued them.

And so the reminder is today to us as Christians, as we believe in God, as we worship God as part of the congregation here today, is not to look at this and wag our finger and look at other people, but it's to remind ourselves that God is first speaking here to us as believers and challenging us that having put our trust in God as Christians, that we don't then turn away and reject Him and return to a kind of practical unbelief as it were, relying on my own strength and my own ideas, searching for joy and meaning and identity, away from God again in our lives as believers.

And so that is the initial warning that comes in this passage. And God is saying that self-reliance is not a spiritual strength. You know, trusting in ourselves is not a spiritual strength.

Now in everyday life that's varied, that's different, isn't it? In everyday life self-reliance has both strengths and weaknesses. It can be a really good thing to rely on your strength.

[8 : 02] It's good to be responsible, isn't it? It's good to think about how best to progress and not to be lazy and not to be unduly relying on other people in our lives.

There's a lot of good qualities in our day-to-day living about self-reliance, what you can do for yourself, how you can pull yourself up. But also sometimes even in day-to-day living, self-reliance isn't a great thing.

And we find a lot of that being exposed at the moment in our talk about mental health struggles. Is that it's not great to struggle on in your own. It's not great to be self-reliant and to just close in on yourself.

But it's great to discuss these things and to share them and to rely on other people. It's not great to be uncooperative. It's not great to not be able to trust others or delegate to others.

So just in day-to-day living, self-reliance can be a good thing. Sometimes it can be not such a good thing. But in relation to God, in relation to our relationship with God, it's a disaster for us.

[9 : 12] You know, as Christians today, and those of us who are Christians here today, we've experienced outstanding rescue. God in Christ has changed our hearts.

He's transformed our perspective. We look to the cross and we don't see there just a kind of thin little weak Jewish man who has been nailed to a cross in some kind of unjust act.

We see the Son of God there, who has died in the cross in our place, and we see Him raised on the third day. We know His forgiveness.

He's led us like a loving Father. He's revealed Himself to us in His Word. And He's helped us to make sense of the senselessness of so much that we experience in life even our failures, the reality of evil around us, sometimes in us, and death itself.

Judgment and salvation are not dirty words to us. They're words that have come to have great meaning. But even for us as Christians, the temptation, because it's hard to believe and it's hard to keep believing is to turn our backs on God and become self-reliant again.

[10 : 36] Maybe we find the exclusivity of living by faith just a little bit tough, and we search for easier satisfaction again and easier meaning.

And it's sometimes for us, it's certainly in my own heart, and in the hearts of Christians, sometimes like, it's a bit like a prisoner, a lifer who has been given freedom, who has been declared innocent, and has gifted a beautiful home.

They can leave prison, and they've got unlimited support. Sometimes like that, I think for us, that same prisoner then choosing to go back into the dubious familiarity of the prison cell.

Somehow just because it's familiar and not being able to cope with the freedom that we have, we can turn away from God as believers because sometimes we can't cope with the freedom of that because we misunderstand it.

God is saying to us today, and He's maybe saying to you, reminding me as a Christian, you're living in a bad place, you've gone back to that place, it's unhealthy and isolating and dangerous and barren.

[11 : 48] It's time to turn back. Maybe He's calling you back to Himself today. But I think there's also a broader challenge. Maybe you're watching online today, or maybe you have turned on for the first time online, you've never trusted, you're uncomfortable with any talk of God at all.

You just presumed in life that God's a myth or a psychological projection that people put onto their lives, some invisible thing to trust in.

You presumed maybe as we all do on the right to a good life and you've accepted death just as a natural consequence of living. And what happens beyond that? Well, that's just anyone's guess, isn't it?

And sometimes we can avoid the big questions about life and its origins, about meaning, about God, about His revelation, particularly in the Bible and especially in the person of Jesus.

And we distance ourselves, you distance yourself from Him. And you may even be aware, as I think we all are at times in our lives of suppressing Him or consciously rejecting what you think He represents.

[13 : 02] And it may be that your philosophy of life or living is, you know, I'm just simply living as if this is all there is. And, you know, I'll make the best of it.

I'll just trust myself and my own instincts. I'll try my hardest. I'll build my character. Maybe you've had trust broken in many times and you find it difficult to trust others.

But you're not sure what to do with your own failings and maybe the failings of others, the questions, the thankfulness. What do we do with thankfulness in our lives?

And you sense that there's possibly a thirst that is not being quenched, a spiritual thirst that's not being quenched. And the passage we read in John's Gospel speaks to us of Jesus being the one who is willing to and wants to and longs to quench our thirst.

He says, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink and living waters will flow from their lives. And that, again, it's a picture of what he comes to offer.

[14 : 13] He's saying, Jesus is saying in that passage, He's saying, look, I made you. You may have turned your back, but I made you. And I love you so much that I've come to put that right.

Christ is the one who's gone into the shadow lands, into the desert place, into that dark place, take away our sins and set us free. That's really the picture of the cross.

It's actually quite interesting on the cross itself. We talk about the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross, and one of them is, he says, I thirst. Now, there's a physical element to that, undoubtedly crucifixion was one of the most brutal deaths possible, and there would have been a natural thirst. But there's clearly that spiritual image there also that he is in that barren place, that place of desolation, that place of dissatisfaction as it were in our place on the cross.

And so he says, I thirst, but is raised on the third day to new life in order to give us life. And so we recognize and we see that self-reliance, as God says here, is not a spiritual strength.

[15 : 32] But the second thing briefly that I want to say is that faith leads to new life. So faith leads to new life. And we see that in the second picture that he gives, which is the picture of the tree beside the living water.

So as roots go down and it doesn't ever need to be concerned, even in a time of drought, it will still bear fruit because its roots are being nourished and fed by the living water, which always is a picture in the Bible of God's grace and God's strength.

And interestingly, there's no difference in the circumstances. There's no difference in the outward circumstances. You know, the desert place or a time of drought for the tree, but it's where the roots are growing, it's what's happening underneath the surface, where their trust lies is where the difference is.

And there's that reality that there's always still huge challenges, whatever our outward circumstances are. But there's this recognition that faith leads to a different kind of life, a different strength and a different vibrancy that comes from a relationship with God, our maker, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

And that is because we come to that place and we'll see this in a moment, that in Christ we recognize Him in this picture of Him being living water, and that we come to Christ because we have been thirsting for meaning and for satisfaction and for significance and for unparalleled love and for guidance and for forgiveness and for wisdom and for worship.

[17 : 15] All of these things that we do and experience in life, we find are satisfied when we come and put our trust in Jesus Christ and give our lives over to Him. He is the living water that will course through us and give us life to the full.

Deal with the challenges and the difficulties that we face. Not wipe them away, but enable us to be, yes, forgiven, but also to cope with the battles and struggles of a drought-filled world sometimes we live in.

And there is always that picture of vitality. I've used this picture a lot here in the church of Shalom, that deep word that means peace.

And it doesn't just mean the absence of war, it's a much deeper word. It means that there's a deep-seated peace and satisfaction that comes from being in relationship with the living God. His energy and His forgiveness and His love and His laws become laws that we love because they are laws of love. Love Him and love our neighbour as ourself.

[18 : 28] And He pours out His Spirit into our lives as we trust in Him so that we can bear His fruit so that there's that vitality of, you know, the New Testament talks about the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, perseverance, all these gifts that He gives to us we recognise and we display counterintuitively.

And He also brings for us as we trust in Him the death of death. Yeah, it's an amazing phrase, the death of death, He satisfies divine justice for us.

We recognise that a good world is a world where justice and love can hold hands together. You can't have, we can't really have love without justice, we can't have justice without love.

It doesn't work in our lives, you know. We cry out a lot of our times in our love, you know, that's not fair. Divine is justice going to be done, especially when we've been wronged ourselves, don't we? And yet we see that, that comes from this recognition of the character and nature of God that our morality, our very beings, our justice comes from God. And you know, water, as this beautiful picture here is life-giving, but it can also be overwhelmingly strong and dangerous, incredibly destructive power.

[19 : 57] So you see that again and again, and Amos 4 speaks about the justice of God like a never-ending river. And I think very often we treat God like a kid's water pistol, you know, tiny and insignificant, doesn't make any difference.

But yet He's this awesome, glorious source of life in this vast universe, infinite moral being, Creator and Judge. And His justice overwhelms us and leaves us without hope, but He takes a price Himself because He is absolutely loving.

And you just, you know, you just wouldn't make that up. Why would you make that up? Someone who offers himself and says, yep, there's an issue, but I provide the answer.

So we rejoice in God and we remind ourselves of the truths that we have in this passage. Now, we're coming to the baptism in just a moment and cue the entry of Sarah, which is good timing. Now, Andy and Sophie, they love the Lord, they've given their hearts to God and they trust in Him as their Savior. And they rightly want to bring up Sarah to know where true love and true life originates.

[21 : 22] They want her to have the foundations of her life in Jesus Christ, that she will send out the very roots of her being to Jesus when she understands and knows to do that.

And we hope, don't we Sarah, that you will grow up to love and serve the Lord Jesus with an evergreen life and a life of amazing fruitfulness.

You can be in my congregation anytime. I'm loving this. You know, whatever circumstances life faces that Sarah will know and love Jesus as her friend and companion and Savior. Now the baptism of an infant child, as we have with Sarah, is a promissory act, okay? It's an act of promise. The actual baptism will not save Sarah, but it does speak of cleansing. It does speak of the life of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. And it brings Sarah visibly and visually into the covenant of grace and into all its privileges and into God's visible family, which is the church.

[22 : 37] And all of us are to point her as she grows up among us to Jesus Christ by our example, by our love, by the shared worship we have with her and by our teaching.

So we all have a responsibility today, and we all recognize that we will be responsible for praying for Sarah, for her mom and dad, for all the families in the church, for all the children and for each and every one of us, not just praying for but loving and caring for and being in community with. So in a moment, you don't really need to go and sit in these seats. You can if you want. But I'll ask Andy and Sophie to take some, to make some promises really about how they will bring up Sarah to know and to love Jesus and within the church family. And we as a church will also take, make a promise with regard to our responsibilities to her as well.