

The Tree • Jeremiah 17:5-10

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Calvin Coolidge [1]

1. President Calvin Coolidge came home from church one Sunday, and his wife asked, "What did the preacher preach about?"
2. In his usual concise manner, Coolidge replied, "Sin."
3. Mrs. Coolidge asked, "Well - what did he say about it?"
4. The President answered, "He was against it."

B. Jeremiah

1. Jeremiah was against the sins of his people.
2. Chapter 17 is a list of the sins that had resulted in God's judgment of the nation of Judah.
3. One of the most serious sins Judah had committed was their military and political alliance with Egypt
 - a. as the Babylonians had risen in power and menaced the northern borders,
 - b. Judah had foraged around to find a strong ally with which to ally herself
 - e. earlier prophets had warned Judah not to do this but to trust in the Lord.
 - f. they told the rulers and the people that the reason the Babylonians were presenting a threat in the first place was as a way to prod them to repent of their idolatry and sin and return to the Lord.
 - g. but the people had rejected their counsel and instead sent ambassadors to Egypt to gain their support
 - h. the Egyptians, ever alert to the opportunity to extend their power, were more than happy to make a treaty
 - i. but they had no intention of making good on it
4. So God says through Jeremiah . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 5-6

⁵ **Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.**

⁶ **For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited.**

1. God tells them that if they put their confidence and trust in man, it will result in bitter disappointment.
2. The picture He draws is one they would all have been able to relate to
 - a. the Dead Sea lies several hundred feet below sea level
 - b. as a result, there is no outlet, and the waters that accumulate there can only evaporate, leaving behind their salts

- c. over the centuries, the size of the Dead Sea has shrunk, leaving behind massive salt flats and formations
 - d. little to nothing can grow in this area, it is a barren, sterile wasteland
 - e. on the borders of this wasteland little shrubs manage to cling to life
 - f. they may live for a few years if the weather permits,
 - g. but if a year or two of drought comes, they wither and die
3. That's what those who have turned from God and instead trust in man are like
 4. They are barren and fruitless.
 5. And when trouble comes, because they have their root in untrustworthy, they quickly wither
 6. When God says in v. 5

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.

- a. he may very well be speaking supremely of King Zedekiah, one of the last kings of Judah
 - b. after the Babylonians had already come once and deported a group of the leading citizens of Jerusalem and set him up as their puppet king,
 - c. he had rebelled and gone to Egypt for help
 - d. the Babylonians then returned, captured him, and as punishment, made him watch as they executed his children before his eyes
 - e. then they put his eyes out, so that the very last memory he would have would be of seeing his children killed – all because of *his* rebellion
 - f. truly Zedekiah was cursed – and his fruit was cut off – all because he trust in man instead of God
7. Contrasted with the one who trusts man, is the one who trusts God . . .

B. Vs. 7-8

- 7 **“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.**
 - 8 **For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.**
1. Far from being a barren desert shrub, the man or woman who trusts the Lord is like a tree on a river bank
 - a. it's roots go deep into good soil
 - b. it wraps it's roots around the underground boulders
 - c. and there is an ample supply of water
 - d. so when trouble comes, when there's a drought, it doesn't really affect it because it has a continual supply of life and strength
 - e. throughout its life, the tree produces fruit
 2. The difference between the desert shrub and the riverside tree is who you trust in
 3. The difference between blessing & cursing is where your confidence is
 4. Where is your confidence this morning?
 - a. is it in God? Is it in the sufficiency of His Word and Spirit?
 - b. or is your confidence in the wisdom and counsel of man?

- c. do you put more trust in the “experts” or God?
- d. when you are in trouble, when you need help – where do you turn?
- 5. There is no end of sources of professional help today
 - a. there are tens of thousands of professional counselors, therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists who will gladly give you an hour once a week
 - b. there are hundreds of various schools of thought on what’s the best way to help people
 - c. each one of them has a pile of supporting research claiming their method is the best
- 6. Visit the bookstore and scan the shelves of the self-help section
 - a. there you will find hundreds of authors
 - b. offering assistance on everything from romantic relationships to healing your inner child
- 7. Millions of people spend billions of dollars buying and reading these volumes, attending the lectures, watching the videos, listening to the tapes
- 8. But how much of it is nothing more than trusting man rather than trusting God?
- 9. The answer is – MOST OF IT
- 10. And what does God say comes of trusting man rather than Him? A curse!
- 11. As our culture has moved progressively *away* from God and His Word as the central realities of our inner life, we have seen a corresponding rise in distress and turmoil
 - a. as we’ve kicked God out of the Public square, we’ve seen civility decline
 - b. as we’ve removed God from the public schools we’ve seen an serious escalation in violence and a decline in academics
 - c. as we’ve expelled God from our homes we’ve seen the breakup of the family and the rapid rise of abuse and perversion
- 12. We have sown the wind, and so are reaping the whirlwind
- 13. But nature abhors a vacuum, so as we’ve exiled God from our culture, we’ve ushered in a host of substitutes to take His place
- 14. Problem is – those substitutes only compound the problem

C. The Answer

- 1. What’s the answer?
- 2. Simple – Trust the Lord and be blessed!
- 3. Look to His Word and Spirit for the counsel you need
- 4. Forget the opinions of the experts – they are merely men and women
- 5. Sink your roots deep into the Lord; wrap them around the solid rock of His Word
- 6. Draw your life and strength, not from the theories of man but from the Truth of God.
- 7. Read the Bible daily! [BACK TO BASIS]

D. More Advice Vs. 9-10

- 1. There is one more thing we need to see here
- 2. Look at vs. 9 & 10 . . .

- 9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?”
- 10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.
3. The heart of almost every problem is the problem of the heart!
 4. And that is this: The heart of man is deceitful!
 - a. in fact, it is so wicked –
 - b. no one but God can know it for what it really is
 5. Have you ever had anyone say to you, or maybe you’ve said it, “Well, I know in my heart that . . . “
 - a. usually the person has just been confronted with some error
 - b. they’ve done or said something that was hurtful or wrong
 - c. and when confronted they attempt to lessen the gravity of their fault by saying that that’s not what they meant
 - d. so they say, “Well, I know my own heart.”
 6. If we’re to take this verse seriously, then we’d have to say that NO – we don’t know our own hearts
 7. We can’t know them because they are the most deceitful thing there is!
 8. The only one who sees the truth about us, is God Himself!
 9. Not only are our hearts deceitful, they are also *desperately wicked*
 - a. that could be better translated as *incurably sick*
 - b. in other words, no amount of self-reform or application of the wisdom of the world can affect a change in our hearts
 - c. sin has bent us, it has twist and marred the image of God in which we were created
 - d. all the self-help books do and the counseling sessions with the therapist accomplish is polish a mirror that reflects a pitiful image
 10. We don’t need *reformation*: We need *regeneration*.
 - a. we don’t need to *reform* our deceitful hearts
 - b. we need *new* hearts
 11. And right there you have the difference between mere religion and genuine Christianity.
 - a. religion aims at reform
 - b. Jesus offers us a new lives with new hearts
 - c. that was part of the promise of the new covenant God made with us
 - d. He took that deceitful, incurably sick heart of stone and replace it with a tender new heart^[2]

E. Search My Heart

1. In v. 10 God says that He searches our hearts and tests our minds
2. As believers, we have been given a *new* heart
3. And our minds are being *renewed*.
 - a. we are breaking out of the old habits that once dominated our lives
 - b. we are re-orienting ourselves around a *new* set of values and priorities
4. And this is not a process without its difficulties
5. There are times when the old way and the new way collide and we battle

6. It's at those moments that we need to learn the lesson this passage and that the history of Israel and Judah teach us.
7. You see, the Jewish people have a long *record of unbelief*
 - a. it was *unbelief* that kept them out of the Promised Land and caused them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years
 - b. it was *unbelief* that kept them from taking full possession of the land the Lord had given to them
 - c. it was *unbelief* that led the nation into gross sin and idolatry
 - d. it was *unbelief* that resulted in the invasion by the Assyrians and Babylonians
 - e. it was *unbelief* that rejected Christ and cost them their nation at the hands of the Romans
 - f. indeed, the Jews have a long record of unbelief
 - g. but tell me, do you think they are unique in that?
 - h. do they have a *bigger* problem with unbelief than Gentiles? No!
8. In writing to the Corinthians^[3], Paul said that all that happened to Israel was to provide an *example* to us, who now by faith in Christ have become *spiritual Jews*.
9. So let's learn the lesson that Israel teaches us: Don't let unbelief hinder the work that God desires to do in your life
 - a. don't turn from Him and put your confidence in man
 - b. and don't let old habits and patterns of living deceive you

III. CONCLUSION

A. A Quiz

1. I am going to ask some questions – please respond out loud
2. Now, when I say “man” I mean mankind – I am speaking generically; men and women = human beings
3. Can you trust man?
4. Are you a man?
5. Can you trust yourself?
6. The answer is No - that's the point of this passage.
7. If you want to be blessed – don't trust man- even yourself = TRUST GOD!
8. Bring yourself honestly before the Lord and ask Him to search your heart and mind and show you where deceit has blinded you
9. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how the things that are going on around you are actually being used by Him to confront you with the need to grow up –to change and become more like Christ.

B. My Battle With Anger

1. I want to tell you a story – true story, about my battle with anger to illustrate what I mean
2. When I was younger, I had a terrible temper
 - a. it often would manifest itself at work
 - b. I managed a restaurant, and at several times, I would lose it and yell, or hit a

- wall or piece of equipment with my fist
3. As soon as I did so, I felt like a fool and deep remorse would come over me
 4. But I just didn't seem to be able to get a handle on it
 5. I prayed and asked God to help me overcome; and there were long periods where I wouldn't blow up; but then something would inevitably happen and I would punch another hole in the wall or break another piece of equipment.
 6. I became completely frustrated and felt like giving up
 7. Then one day, while driving in the car and begging God to give me victory, I sensed the Spirit telling me that my outbursts were not the problem, they were the symptom – there was something deeper, something more related to me and who I perceived myself to be that was standing in the way.
 8. What that was, I had no idea, but I now knew that once I discovered what that thing was, it would be the beginning of the end of my struggle with outbursts of rage
 9. Just a couple weeks later, after praying that God would show me where I was broken, where sin had marked me and where deceit had blinded me to my own condition, the Holy Spirit allowed me to see how obsessed with control I was.
 - a. I had to be in control
 - b. if I wasn't, I felt insecure and worthless
 - c. I was a power hungry little dictator
 - d. and I used outbursts of anger as a way to re-assert my control over situations and people
 - e. I only blew up when I felt like people weren't doing what I wanted them to do
 - f. and it worked; they would always jump back to work and do exactly what I wanted
 - g. and that's why I had no victory over the behavior – it got the job done of putting me back in control
 - h. but what I didn't have was control over myself – and that is why I had to have control over others
 10. God showed me that day that I am not in control – He is; and it was a form of idolatry for me to try to take His place in my job, in my home and in my own life.
 11. Beginning that day, my struggle with anger took on a whole new direction
 12. The outbursts quickly declined in frequency – and now, years later, I can say they have virtually disappeared

C. Your Story

1. The Spirit is doing a similar work in you
2. Are you going through a struggle with some distressing habit?
3. Are you in conflict with another person; a mate, a relative, a friend?
4. Realize that ultimately what the Lord intends through that is to change you – to make you more like Him.
5. But don't go running to the secular self-help section of the local bookstore
6. Run to God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to show you where deceit has blinded you; where your thinking needs to be changed
7. Don't trust man – not even *yourself*

8. Trust God!

[1] Wiersbe, Warren, *Be Decisive*

[2] Ezeziel 36:26

[3] 1 Corinthians. 10:6, 11