

Jeremiah 17:5–8 (NIV)

⁵This is what the Lord says:

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

⁶That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;
they will not see prosperity when it comes.
They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.

⁷“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.

⁸They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.”

#blessed

Are you blessed? A few years back, there was a trend on social media where folks would post some ritzy stuff from their life and tag the post #blessed. A young woman sipping a macchiato in an Italian café: #blessed. A rapper on a jet ski with a gold chain: #blessed. After a few years of that, Christian churches started having sermon series called #blessed where preachers tried to show the Christian meaning of that word. So, are you blessed? That depends on what you mean.

So if Jesus had an Instagram account and he tagged a post #blessed, what would be in the photo? We get a hint of that in the gospel for today. Jesus said, **“Blessed are you who are poor.” (Luke 6:20)** Can you picture a beggar under a bridge, #blessed. St. Paul gave us another image in 2 Corinthians **“When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)** Imagine this tweet, “Failed my exam!” “Just got COVID” “Really struggling to find my purpose in life” #blessed. Here in the book of Jeremiah, we find the key that

unlocks the Bible's definition of the word "blessed." **"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord." (Jeremiah 17:7)**

I Don't Feel Blessed

Are you blessed? I know some of you don't feel blessed. A few weeks ago, I preached a sermon called something like, "Following Jesus is Delightful." And wouldn't you know, that week, I talked to a grieving widow, a man battling addiction, a woman who couldn't find a reason to get out of bed, and a little kid who said everyone is always yelling at his house. Following Jesus can be delightful, but sometimes it doesn't feel very blessed. So how can we say, **"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord?" (Jeremiah 17:7)**

Jeremiah Was Blessed

Maybe we can learn from Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah was a preacher who lived 600 years before Jesus was born, and his nickname was "the weeping prophet." God told him to condemn his audience. They had abandoned the Lord, and to get their attention back, God allowed the foreign nation of Babylon to capture them and destroy their land. That was Jeremiah's message, and he was not very popular. One time, the government put Jeremiah in stocks and publicly made fun of him. Another time they threw him in a pit, and he sank in mud up to his knees. Two different times the king took Jeremiah's writings, his life's work, and destroyed it, so he had to start from scratch. So what would Jeremiah post on Facebook? #blessed? Doesn't seem like it to me!

But all of that was minor compared to Jeremiah's saddest day. For decades he had been warning that Babylon would capture the city, and then, at the end of his life, it happened. Old man Jeremiah saw battering rams break down Jerusalem's city walls. He saw God's temple engulfed in flames. He saw foreign people praise false gods as they tied up God's people. When the destruction was over, Jeremiah cried. In the Bible, do you know what book comes after Jeremiah? It's called Lamentations, and it's exactly what it sounds like—four chapters of Jeremiah lamenting, crying. Jeremiah looked like a loser. His God looked powerless. Perhaps you've felt that in our country. Was Jeremiah blessed? It didn't look like it!

But this sends chills up my spine. As Jeremiah sits there weeping, he knows somewhere in the back of his mind, the words God spoke to him: **"Blessed is**

the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.” (Jeremiah 17:7) He knew the definition of blessed. Blessed doesn't mean everything goes right for you. It means no matter how things go, God is for you.

The Shrub and the Tree

God gives us a vivid way to remember that. Imagine two plants. One is a little juniper bush out in the desert. It has shallow roots. It needs rain every season, or it will dry up like a tumbleweed. The other is a big tree planted beside a river. It has deep roots connected to the stream, so it doesn't depend on rain. When Jeremiah felt like a dried-up shrub, God said, **⁵This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one... who gets thrown in a pit? Who sees his hometown burning? Whose home gets foreclosed? Who mourns the loss of a loved one? No! Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. ⁶That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.**

A bush in the desert is fine as long as it's raining, but when it gets hot, it's in trouble.

The same thing happens to people who turn their hearts away from the Lord. Some people trust in themselves, and a little bit of that is appropriate. God gave you abilities, and you can use them. That's great as long as you have those abilities, but you learn something when your abilities disappear. What would happen to your well-being if you lost the ability to take care of yourself? What if God took from you the ability to do what you love? Would you dry up like a tumbleweed?

Some people trust in others. That's what happens when all your hopes for the future depend on the success of our nation. Or if the only way you'll be happy in the future is if your love life works out the way you're hoping. For some, your mind and heart are obsessed with the doctor or medication or exercise, and those things alone can give you peace. If your hope is based on those things and they are working well, you feel blessed! But what if they don't?

My dear Christian friends, what if you had Jeremiah's life—I mean if you were powerless and lonely, and your nation is collapsing around you? If that would

destroy you, you do not trust in the Lord. All of us have some area of our life where we trust in man and turn our hearts away from the Lord. It can make you feel like a shrub in the desert, but you don't have to.

Do you know what makes a tree by a stream different from a bush in the desert? Roots. The Lord says, **7“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. 8They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”**

When the weatherman says, “there’s a chance of rain,” the bush says, “If it doesn’t rain, I’m going to die!” The tree says, “Rain would be nice, but my roots will drink from this stream even in a drought.” That’s what it’s like to trust in the Lord.

“Lord, bonus blessings would be great, but if you take my health, I’ll be ok. You will take care of me.” “Lord, if you allow me to spend part of my life missing someone, I’ll be ok because I have you.” “Lord, if our country goes downhill, we’ll be ok because of you.”

Jeremiah Trusted the Lord

All those what-ifs happened to Jeremiah. He knew people who had all their hopes tied to the city of Jerusalem, and their hopes were destroyed when the city was. He knew people who had all their confidence in the earthly temple, and their confidence went up in smoke. But Jeremiah trusted the Lord. He knew that when Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord came through for them; he promised a Savior. The Lord came through for Noah; he saved him from the flood in a great ark. The Lord came through for Abraham by giving him a son when he was a hundred years old. The Lord came through for David when he took away David’s sin. Jeremiah knew enough about the Lord to know that he could be trusted. Especially when blessings went away, God came through.

You know that too. When you are overwhelmed by guilt, the Lord pinned your sin to his own Son, Jesus, and sunk it in a grave. When your heart has a hole because you lost someone, the Lord comes through; he says that just as Jesus rose from the dead, so too will you for a grand reunion. You know Jeremiah’s Lord. So on the day Jeremiah’s world fell apart, it didn’t destroy him. But if he

had a Twitter account, he just might have posted, “**#blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.**” (Jeremiah 17:7)

No Fear

#blessed is not currently trending on social media. Quite the opposite; there is a pandemic of panic going through our world. Some people are freaking out about sickness. Others are afraid about the direction our country is going. Others look around society and can identify all the problems. God cares deeply about all those issues and we can too. But you, Christian, can do it without the panic. God says about a tree: “**It does not fear when heat comes... it has no worries in a year of drought.**” (Jeremiah 17:8) You face the world’s problems without fear because you know the Savior God. That’s what it means to be blessed.

Trust is Like 3 Ice Fishermen

It’s like the three guys who went ice fishing. Have you heard this one? Three guys go ice fishing, and while they’re out there, it gets hot. The first guy is afraid he will fall through the ice on his walk back to shore, so he gets down on his belly to spread out his weight, and he does the inchworm all the way back. The second guy is a bit more trusting, so he walks across, but he’s freaking out the whole time. And then there’s the old-timer. He’s done this before. He hops in his Chevy Silverado and drives the one-ton pickup safely to land. Which man had the safest journey? They were all safe! Their safety didn’t depend on how much they trusted the ice. It depended on the ice! It’s the same thing with our faith in God. It’s not like people with big faith in God are more secure, and people with wishy-washy faith are less safe because it’s God who takes care of both! It’s just that people who trust God have a lot more confidence on their journey home.

When those fishermen got to shore, the two young guys asked the old-timer why he trusted the ice. “I did my research,” he said. “I drilled a few holes. That ice is 4 feet thick the whole way across!” That’s how you increase your faith in God too. Do a little research. Read what God has done for his people in the past. Study the promises he’s made. You’ll find that your God is a Savior all the way through.

I'll ask you one last time: Are you blessed? You may not have gold chains and jet skis, but you're blessed, alright. You have everything you need for good times and bad. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.

Amen.