

Jeremiah 17:5-10 “A Tree By The River” 11/24/24

Have you ever noticed how much wisdom may be found in our children?

- Patrick, age 10, said, “Never trust a dog to watch your food”
- Michael, age 14, said, “When your dad is mad at you and asks, ‘Do I look stupid?’ don’t answer him. And neither should you tell your mom that her diet is not working”
- Kirsten, age 9, said, “Never hold a dust buster and a cat at the same time”
- Naomi, age 15 said, “If you want a puppy, start out by asking for a horse”
- Lauren, age 9 said, “Felt markers are not good to use as lipstick”
- And finally, Eileen, age 8 said, “Never try to baptize a cat”¹

Sometimes we place greater trust on some people’s wisdom because of their expertise or because of how well known they are - Billie Burke was an American actress who lived from 1886 until 1970 - You know her because she played the Good Witch “Glinda” in the 1939 movie “The Wizard of Oz”

On an ocean voyage, in the early 20th century - She saw a man with a bad cold - Billie shared some advice with him: “Drink lots of Orange Juice, go to your cabin, cover yourself with lots of blankets, and sweat it out” - She added, “listen to me, I’m Billie Burke of Hollywood”

That may have impressed some people of that day, as the voice of authority - But the man to whom she spoke was Dr. Mayo, one of the founders of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN²

Human wisdom is great, but we should not be foolish enough to place all our trust there - We need to be cautious of an all too human flaw of putting our faith in our own abilities - Rather than seeking God’s help

¹ SermonCentral.com

² Bible Illustrator for Windows, © 1990-1998, (Parsons Technology, Hiawatha, IA)

This is typical of human nature as we may see in today's Old Testament reading where Jeremiah records God's Word speaking about the same type of human folly

He writes, in Jeremiah 17:5 "Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord."³

Some people have always placed their trust in themselves - In mere mortals, in human beings - They rely on human knowledge, however flawed or incomplete that is - They look to weak, fragile, and perishing flesh for their strength

They place their trust in themselves rather than in God for their security and hope and righteousness - They are turned in upon themselves - In the words of the Scriptures, They are like a bush in the wastelands, dwelling in the parched places of the desert

By having faith only in themselves, these people are abiding in such a parched place - That when prosperity comes - They will not see it - Because by then, they will undoubtedly have withered away and will be all dried up

Others trust in Jesus - They have the Lord God Almighty as their life, security, hope, strength, and righteousness

Of these Jeremiah writes, in verses 7 & 8, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. 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"

These are people who look outside and away from themselves - Relying instead on their Creator and Savior

³ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,
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Notice that both of these types of people have faith - They both place their trust in something - The difference is where people put their faith

We should also notice that this passage is not condemning all who listen to human wisdom - Just those who place all their trust there - And turn their hearts away from the Lord

I wish I could say that I am always like that tree planted by the water - That every decision is prayerfully considered - That in every moment I fully trust the far greater strength and wisdom of my Savior Jesus

Yet, despite knowing that this is how I should be - The reality is, that sometimes, I drift away into the two-year-old's attitude of "I can do it myself!" - Instead of the far superior attitude of "with God all things are possible"

Beverly Carradine was a Methodist pastor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries at a time when we still named our little baby boys Ashley, Beverly, Lesley, and even Shirley - He was a prolific writer - And God blessed his ministry with several dramatic revivals

In his day, Camp Meetings were less likely to be dependent on permanent buildings - Instead, they often would turn an empty field into a city of tents - The following experience is from one such camp meeting

Reverend Carradine writes, while lying in my tent resting one afternoon at a camp meeting, a bird flew in, and at once became frightened and tried to escape - The agitated performance of an hour by the confused little creature filled my mind with reflections

I saw at once that the bird's theological education was all wrong - He had lost his liberty, and was in a lot of trouble about the matter - The bird was evidently seeking to recover the beautiful experience of a life of freedom - But in all the wrong way

Its constant effort was to fly upward seeking freedom - But the corners and all the upward portion of the tent was tightly closed - The only opening was a small triangular space near the floor in front

The bird did not even look down, much less fly down - But sought deliverance by the upward route repeatedly, only to be driven back and sit breathless for a temporary rest on a nail high up on the post

I spoke to the penitent seeker as I lay on my bed and said, You will never get the blessing that way - The way of your salvation is not up there - You will have to get down low if you want to be free

The bird listened, but would not act on my advice - In fact, he seemed worried over my interference - And said with a nervous chirp that he was a bird of self-sufficient temperament - And could not bear for any one to speak to him with that kind of advice

The bird felt better when he was left to himself - And that he believed in working out his salvation alone, with fear and trembling

So, we became silent, and witnessed fully thirty or forty failures in the next half hour - He beat his wings in vain against the thick cloth of the tent - This continued a while and then he would come back to the same place, a nail in the top of the post where he would rest a few moments before making another vain effort for deliverance in the upward direction

At last, in sheer exhaustion, he fell upon my trunk, rested a few moments with open bill and throbbing throat - From this lower perch he dropped to the floor, looking bewildered and exhausted

Just then, he lifted his head and saw the opening before him, - Next, he sprang through into liberty and sunshine - As he fluttered through the air, he gave a glad exuberant chirp that I knew stood for hallelujah!⁴

⁴ adapted from a illustration by Rev. B. Carradine (1848-1931), Living Illustrations, © 1908, (Christian Witness Co., Boston & Chicago)

That bird is a good illustration of human character - Every one of us is prone to tackling things in our own strength - Like that bird - We often need to be brought low - Even to the point of exhaustion - Before we are willing to seek God's help

Yet, whatever our task or decision, we do not need to do it alone - And neither should we be willing to try to be so self reliant - "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" says Psalm 124:8

As I am sure you are aware - Life in the world is not always easy - There are plenty of hardships, suffering, and pain

To borrow Jeremiah's imagery - Life is full of those wilderness places - We all have times of journeying through those parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives

Notice in Jeremiah's illustration the tree that is planted near the stream - And the bush in the wilderness - Are both exposed to the harshness of that dry place

Both are scorched by the sun - Both are deprived of rain by the drought - Both are torn by the wind - But the difference is that the tree can draw nourishment and moisture from its roots

We too will face troubles in this life - If we are going to go it alone - We are likely to be as dry and vulnerable as a bush in the desert - But if we draw our nourishment from our roots in the faith - Then we too can be as strong as that tree

It is God's will for us that we do not make those wilderness journeys alone - Matthew 11:28-29 record Jesus' words - He said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"

Everyone is going to have faith in something - Either we have faith in our own limited abilities - Or we place our trust in God - Knowing that with God our limited abilities are greatly enhanced

Warren Wiersbe said, "The people who criticize faith don't realize how big a part it plays in everyday affairs. It takes faith to get married because marriage vows are basically promises.

It takes faith to send children off to school - It takes faith to get a prescription filled - It takes faith to eat in a restaurant, deposit money in a bank, sign a contract, drive on the highway, or get on an airplane or on an elevator

Faith is not some kind of religious experience for the elite; it is the glue that helps hold people's lives together

But remember, faith is only as good as the object we place our faith in - If we trust people, we get what people can do; if we trust money, we get what money can do; if we trust ourselves, we get what we can do; but if we trust God, we get what God can do"⁵

Today's passage calls us to be sure our trust is placed firmly in the correct place

In the words of the Psalm 146, "Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God."⁶

⁵ Warren Wiersbe as quoted by Bible Illustrator for Windows, © 1990-1998, (Parsons Technology, Hiawatha, IA)

⁶ Psalm 146:3-5 - The Holy Bible, New International Version,

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