

“How Green Are You?”—Jeremiah 17:7-8

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “How Green Are You?”, is Jeremiah 17:7-8 → *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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“How green are you?” Posing this question in our day and age would probably bring responses having to do with your perspective of environmental issues. To be “green” in our culture brings forth thoughts of recycling, pollution control, energy and soil conservation, organic production and any number of other efforts on the part of people to “save the planet.” We are bombarded with advertisements encouraging us to be more “green”—that is, more conscientious of our use of natural resources and proper waste management.

While such encouragement could be seen from a Christian perspective of the God-given “dominion” which we have been given through Adam & Eve (cf. Genesis 1:26-28), the Scriptures also make it clear that *the present form of this world is passing away* (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:31)

because it is corrupted by sin. As Christians, we do strive to practice good stewardship of the earth and all that is in it with “sanctified discretion.” However, it is not in an effort to save the planet since it is heading toward *a day which God has fixed . . . on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man Whom He has appointed*—Jesus (cf. Acts 17:31). On that day *the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed* (cf. 2 Peter 3:10).

Thus, when the Holy Spirit speaks in the Scriptures about being “green,” He is more concerned about our spiritual lives in light of Judgment Day. The primary salvation with which He is concerned is the salvation of your soul **on His terms, in His way, by His power!** Green, then, is a picture used by God to speak about you living in a proper relationship with Himself and others. It depicts spiritual life and health instead of spiritual death and sickness. In the preaching of the prophet Jeremiah it is the contrast of a dried up *shrub in the desert* (cf. Jeremiah 17:6) to a *tree planted by water* (verse 7).

In our text Jeremiah called God’s people to repentance by placing before them a description of those who are cursed and those who are blessed **in the sight of the LORD**. According to 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*. Such a person is

described as a “dried up” *shrub in the desert who shall not see any good come, dwelling in the parched places of the wilderness* (cf. Jeremiah 17:6).

Trusting *in man and making flesh* (i.e. human effort) your *strength* is actually a part of life in this world. We depend upon each other in many ways, providing each other strength, help and even deliverance in many situations of life. It is necessary as we live in community with others. However, when it comes to your relationship with Yahweh and your eternal soul, trusting *in man and making human effort your strength* spiritually is dangerous. It will produce a distorted and warped view of your relationship with God.

For instance, a person can securely claim to believe in the LORD and His Son, Jesus, while living with a heart which has actually *turn away from the LORD* (cf. Jeremiah 17:6). How can that be? God’s people to whom Jeremiah was sent wondered why Yahweh was speaking His judgment against them. They didn’t feel like they were turning their hearts away from Him. They believed in Him and recognized His importance in their lives. So, what was the problem?

It was their idolatry, breaking Yahweh’s first commandment: *You shall have no other gods **before Me*** (literally, “in my face”) (cf. Exodus 20:2). In fact, the LORD described their idolatry at the beginning of this chapter as partaking in the worship of other gods at *their altars and their Asherim, **beside every green tree and on the high hills*** (cf. Jeremiah 17:2). Asherah

was a pagan fertility goddess. Pagans trusted in imaginary gods, usually setting up places of worship *on the high hills* in a effort to be close to them and get their attention by the religious rituals. Worshiping *beside every green tree* had to do with fertility and life, many times accompanied by sexual immorality in that worship.

Even though they continued to believe in Yahweh, pray to Him and offer their sacrifices to Him, their hearts were actually turned away from Him as they flaunted their worship of other affections in His face! They felt secure with the LORD and with Asherah, Baal, Molech, and a host of other false gods, to whom they gave names. This is why He referred to Himself over and over again as “Yahweh, **your** God.” His name is important in the midst of paganism. In light of such “in His face” idolatry it’s no wonder He said in Jeremiah 17:9 → *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Only Yahweh understands it and desires to deal with it so our hearts are turned toward the LORD.*

It is no different when Christians hold counterfeit gods in their hearts while feeling secure in their relationship with Jesus. Attachments to materialism, family, hobbies, a political ideal or individual, money, rituals, jobs, keepsakes, addictions and “pet sins” in unrepentance . . . the list goes on and on. Many times such attachments of the heart to such counterfeit gods flaunted in the face of Jesus reveal themselves in

contempt for His Word and believing myths which discredit God's work, such as, "It doesn't matter what you believe. We're all trying to get to the same God." Such attachment spews out sinful behavior towards other people and, more importantly, depend upon *flesh*—one's own ideas and works—to get to heaven. Jeremiah's words extend to you as well: Repent, trust in the LORD and love Yahweh *your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might* (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5).

Verse 7 of our text describes this relationship as more than simply *trust in Yahweh*. Notice he says, *Blessed is the man . . . whose trust **is** the LORD*. This is not just a matter of your trying to figure out how to trust in God and avoid idolatry. Rather, He has it all figured out already and gives it to you completely by His grace. Your trust is a gift given by His Spirit through the Person & Work of Yahweh in the flesh—Jesus. He loved His Father perfectly **for you!** He took on the judgment and punishment of your idolatrous sin in His perfect sacrifice on the cross! As "I AM"—Yahweh in the flesh (cf. John 8:58)—your sin is atoned for and you stand forgiven and righteous in God's sight!

As a person *whose trust **is** the LORD*, then you are "green" spiritually, *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* (verse 8). In other words, you are full of life and living with a different relationship

with the world around you and those in it. While being fed here with God's Word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit empowers you *when heat comes* (i.e. temptations) to be discerning and resist idolatrous desires. He empowers you to not be *anxious in the year of drought* (i.e. despairing during trials and tragedies). Instead, you do *not cease to bear fruit*—that is, you go forward in faith to meet those trials and tragedies with *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* and guards your *hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (cf, Philippians 4:7).

It also produces a new life (i.e. “green”) perspective of how you perceive and live in your life with stuff, money, family, relationships, interests, hobbies and so forth. You recognize them a gifts which God provides for the support of your body and life, even for you enjoyment as 1 Timothy 4:4-5 says: *Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

The Holy Spirit produces the *fruit* of desiring to be faithful to Lord Jesus and committed to Him while using your stuff and money, while fulfilling the various vocations and tasks in life as you live in relationship with others. He will also produce the *fruit* of bringing the Gospel of Jesus to bear on all of life so all can experience a truly “green” perspective and life in the grace, love and forgiveness of sins in Jesus. When your *trust is the LORD* your roots are in Jesus. Amen.

Jesus says: *Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him
will never be thirsty again.
The water that I will give him
will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

(John 4:14)

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