

Broken Cisterns

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of worshiping God and the consequences of forsaking Him, highlighting the difference between living water and stagnant water.

Duration: 43:10

Scripture: Psalm 115:4-8, Jeremiah 2:13, John 7:37, Romans 1:25, 2 Peter 2:17-19

Topics: "Idolatry", "True Worship"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of worshiping the true and living God, highlighting the dangers of seeking fulfillment in broken cisterns, which represent false beliefs and idols that cannot satisfy our spiritual thirst. The speaker draws parallels between the nation of Judah's decline due to forsaking God and the current spiritual state of nations like the United States, urging listeners to return to genuine worship of God. The message underscores the need to recognize and address the deep spiritual drive within us that compels us to worship, emphasizing that true satisfaction and freedom are found in worshiping the Lord.

Transcript

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to Psalm 115. I'll read the first, the odd-numbered verses, and we ask you to join together in the reading of the even-numbered verses, and shall we stand to read the Word of God. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake.

For as the watchman did in his study, there is none like our God. Our God is in heavens. He has done whatsoever He has pleased.

Their eyes are silver and gold, but their words are in His hands. They have mouths, but they speak not, eyes, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not, noses have pain, but they smell not.

They have hands, but they handle not, and feet have they, but they walk not, and neither speak they through their throat. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord, for He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord, for He is their help and their shield.

The Lord hath reminded all of us, He will bless us, He will bless the house of Israel, He will bless the house of Aaron, and He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great. The Lord shall increase you more and more, to be with your children. You are blessed of the Lord, which made the heaven and

earth.

The heavens and heavens are the Lord's, but the earth and heavens are the children of man. The dead praise not the Lord, and neither any that go down into silence. But He will bless the Lord this time forth and evermore.

Praise the Lord. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord, we have gathered together to praise You and to give thanks to You for all that You have done for us, Lord, and the blessings that You bestow upon us day after day. Lord, You are so good, and we thank You, Lord, for the opportunity that we have now of gathering and declaring, Lord, Your love, Your goodness, and Your grace unto those that fear Thee. Blessed we pray, Lord, the study of the word this morning.

Open our hearts, Lord, speak to us, and help us to respond, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

You may be seated. Well, we are beginning a new book, the book of Jeremiah, as we continue our journey through the Bible. Pastor Skip asked if we could slow down to two chapters a week, at least going through Jeremiah.

And I consented, because Jeremiah is such an important book in the Bible. It is a book that parallels the conditions of the United States today. And the message that Jeremiah had for the nation of Judah is very appropriate for the United States today.

Jeremiah had probably one of the most difficult tasks that any minister has ever been called to fulfill. Jeremiah had to watch the death of a nation, to see it go down and die, because they would not listen to the warnings from God. The conditions that brought the death of the nation are conditions that we see taking place here in the United States today.

We are following a parallel path that brought the destruction of Judah. And thus the message of Jeremiah is very relevant to the day and the age in which we live. And so you'll find our study in Jeremiah a fascinating study as we draw the parallels between his ministry and the conditions that he had to deal with in the decline of Judah and as we see it paralleled in our nation today.

So tonight chapters one and two as Pastor Skip will lead us as we begin our journey through Jeremiah. This morning I want to draw your attention to the second chapter in verse 13, where the Lord declares, for my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and they've hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

You can't stop yourself. You can't help yourself. It's ingrained into the very fibers of your being.

You must worship. You can't stop. You do worship.

If you don't worship the true and the living God, then there are other things that you do worship because man was made to worship. We can't help ourselves. The psychologists talk about the biological drives that man has in order to maintain the homeostasis of the body, the air drive, the thirst drive, the hunger drive.

The sociologists speak of the emotional drives that we have, that need for love, that need for attention, that need for security, that need to be needed, and we are driven by these needs. But the Bible speaks of another drive. It is the drive of the spirit of man, that which drives us to worship.

In Deuteronomy 4:19, the Lord said, when you look up at the heavens and you see the sun and the moon and the stars, and you are driven to worship them, there is that worship drive in each of us. We must worship something. Just as our bodies need air to exist, just as we need love to survive, so your spirit needs to worship, and indeed everyone worships something.

Paul in his letter to the book of Romans spoke of the folly of worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator. We see that manifested in our world today. We have people who are worshipping nature.

They go around worshipping trees, worshipping clouds, and worshipping nature. There is actually a move on foot to create laws that would ban lawnmowers. They say that that little blade of grass, when it hears the lawnmower coming, must shiver and quake, knowing that it's going to be clipped again.

And every week we go through this barbarous kind of cutting that little blade of grass and do not give it a chance to really grow up, and we need to create a law that will ban lawnmowers. I'll tell you what. When you begin to worship nature, you can really get fluky.

And so it is. When a person abandons the worship of God, they try to find meaning, they try to find purpose in the worship of all different kinds of things. But God calls them broken cisterns that can't hold water.

God created this drive for worship, and God created it so that we would worship Him. But using that drive to worship and substituting anything less than God is a perversion of that worship drive. God created you to worship that you might know the joy, the fulfillment, the satisfaction, the contentment of worshipping the true and the living God.

Now, as we go back in chapter two, God tells us what the problems were with the nation of Judah. God calls them to remember their first love that they once had for Him, their abandonment unto God, their worship of God. Where is the love, He said, that we experienced when we first were going through our engagement period? God said, you remember how you followed me out into the wilderness? You left the land of Egypt to pursue after me.

You had a desire, a consuming desire to live holy lives. But God said, what went wrong? Where did I fail you? What did I do that caused you to turn away from me? How is it that you have forgotten me? You seem to forget that I brought you out of the misery of Egypt and that I preserved you through that wilderness experience. You seem to forget that I have given to you this beautiful land that you now enjoy, and you're eating of the fruits of it.

But you seem to forget that I had a very important part in giving you this land and in bringing you the blessings that you now enjoy. I think of our land, how that God created our nation, a nation that was built on trust in God. A nation, because it honored God and honored Jesus Christ, became a strong, the strongest nation of the world, and the envy of the world because of what God did in the creating of our nation, because they were seeking God, they loved God, and they were serving God.

And now we have people coming into our nation that are worshipping other gods, and they are wanting the rights taken from us to publicly worship our God, and that we should be all-inclusive and including all of the other gods from the nations from which they came. Well, why don't they go back to those nations and worship their gods? Why is it that they love our nation? They love the benefits that God has given to us, but they would keep us, if possible, from worshipping God. God said that the priests were not really seeking

the Lord.

The spiritual leaders were failing the people. The priests were operating in their positions but taking advantage of the people and using their positions for their own personal gain. The Lord said that those who were supposed to be teaching the people about God didn't even know God themselves.

And then God said that the pastors were transgressing against the laws of God, and that the prophets were prophesying by false gods. So there was a breakdown within the nation, a spiritual breakdown. I was looking this morning, I got here early, and I was looking at a magazine that came in the mail that deals with new technologies for the church, and how they have developed all of these tremendous lighting effects, how that you can project on the back wall just brilliant lights, and all of these new technologies by which we can enhance the worship of the people, and these PowerPoints and displays, and all of these things that they've developed.

But what's wrong with just simply teaching the Word of God? Why do we need all of these enhancements and all of these fancy gadgets to worship God? And you see, it's because we've not really understood the truth of God. And the real need is just the simple teaching of the Word of God, simply. God's challenge to them was to consider this.

He said, search the nations. Search the history books. See if you can find a nation that has forsaken their God, which are really not true gods.

In other words, those nations that are worshiping false gods, even though their gods are false, they don't forsake their God. In other words, what an amazing thing. Here you have forsaken the worship of the true and the living God.

That doesn't happen even among pagans who are worshiping pagan gods. Nations don't change their gods. The Mohammeds will still worship Allah.

Those in India will not forsake Hinduism. The Nepalese will not forsake Buddha. And yet Israel has forsaken Jehovah.

Europe, England, America are forsaking Jesus Christ and are fast becoming pagan nations. Americans will soon be voting into offices men and women who believe in and promote anti-biblical concepts of abortion and homosexual causes. And so God said there are two evils.

Number one, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water. Water is essential for life, physically, spiritually. If you're to have physical life, you have to have water.

If you have spiritual life or desire to have spiritual life, you've got to have spiritual water. It's essential for life. Presently we have little robots that are probing the surface of Mars.

They are seeking to determine if Mars once had water on it. Why? Because we know that water is essential for life and they are searching to see if perhaps there was some form of life on the planet Mars in some time in the past. And maybe that's where life developed and then came on a meteorite to the earth and brought life to the earth.

But the whole program is searching for the possibility of life which would be assumed if they can find traces of water once existing on the planet Mars. In John 7.37, Jesus stood there at the Temple Mount

and cried to the multitude of people that had gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

And he who drinks of the water that I give, out of his innermost being there will gush torrents of living water. And John tells us that he was speaking of the Holy Spirit which was not yet given. The water of life, the last invitation in the Bible, is for those that are thirsty to come and to drink of the water of life freely.

God said, but you've forsaken me. The fountain of living water. Now living water is water that is gushing forth out of an artesian well or out of a spring.

You don't need a pump. You don't need to drop a bucket down into the well. The water just comes flowing forth.

Living water. Running water. Flowing forth from a spring or from an artesian well.

And God says that he's that living water. You've forsaken me. The fountain of living water.

And instead you've sought to satisfy your thirst by drinking out of a cistern. But God said the cistern is broken. It can't hold water.

So God said, you've hewn out these cisterns. Man-made systems of belief. Man-made religions.

But what can you say of them? They cannot satisfy that thirst that we have for God. They are broken cisterns. They can't hold water.

The land of Israel was a very arid land. There was one major source of water and that was the Jordan River. Up near Mount Hermon, there are three major springs.

The Banias right there at the base. Not far from Mount Hermon is the Dan Spring. And then also on the slopes the Hatzbani.

These three springs, the rivers that flow from them, merge into the Jordan River, flow on down into the Sea of Galilee and then through the great Syro-Egyptian rift into the Dead Sea. And this is the major supply of water for the nation of Israel. Now throughout the land there are other small springs.

And cities were built around these small springs because you need water in order to survive. And so you'll find a spring down there in Jericho. You'll find one up at Megiddo.

And wherever they had the ancient cities, you'll always find that there was a spring in that area that provided water for the domestic needs, but never enough water to farm or to irrigate a farm. And thus water was very scarce. The few little streams that flow are usually flowing only during the winter months and they dry up in the summer.

So it was necessary for the people to create reservoirs, which they called cisterns, and they would carve these out of solid rock. They would begin chipping away the rock at the top and make a hole about the size of the top of the platform here. And as they would chip down, as they would get down a few feet, then they would begin to go laterally and they would begin to carve out these huge caverns.

There at Masada, there is a cistern that's about the size of the center part of the auditorium here that was carved out of rock in order to supply the needs that they had for water living up there at the top of Masada,

which is, of course, in the wilderness, very arid area. But here is this large cistern that was built. And there along the top of the Masada are many cisterns.

And you'll see where they've carved in the rocks the little grooves for the water during the rain to come flowing in. This one major cistern was fed by the stream that is down below and they brought the water from upstream on the same level into this huge cistern there at the top of Masada. But that was the way by which they were able to live in this arid land and survive during the summer by the cisterns.

Around Jerusalem you'll find so many of these reservoirs, these cisterns that they used to trap the winter rains so that they would have water for their gardens in the summer and water for their domestic needs. Of course, Jerusalem was built around the spring of Gaon, and that spring runs, and it met their domestic needs, but they all had cisterns as a rule to meet the needs for their agriculture. And sometimes in digging out a cistern, you would find that unfortunately there was a rift in the rock that you were digging out.

And when you went to fill the cistern with the rainwater, it just leaked on out through the rift. And it was a broken cistern, a cistern that couldn't hold water. That was what the Lord was referring to.

You have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and hewn out cisterns, broken cisterns. Now a cistern at best was a good reservoir. It would hold water, but at best the water would get stale in time.

And towards the end of summer or even the middle of summer, these little wiggle toes or wiggle things would develop in the water. Usually it was mosquito larva. And so if you wanted to drink from the cistern, it would be wise to strain the water so you don't get extra protein with your water.

Now if you were very thirsty and you had the choice of drinking out of a running spring or out of a cistern, what would you choose? Well, I know what I would choose. The water that's coming out of a spring up above Forest Home, up that stream there that feeds or comes through Forest Home, up a ways there's a fabulous stream and a spring of water up there just comes right bubbling out of the sand. And it used to be years ago when I was in high school and all, I would drive up there and take a pup tent, and I would camp out next to that little spring, and I would take my Bible and just go up there and seek the Lord and drink the water.

Oh, it was so pure. It was so good and cool and just a great time. I can still just close my eyes and think of it.

Great water, you know, running water, living water. And the Lord said, you've forsaken me, the fountain of living water. And you're trying to find meaning.

You're trying to find satisfaction out of drinking from a cistern. But he said, it's a broken cistern. It won't hold water.

Take the religions of the world. God describes them as broken cisterns that cannot hold water. They hold out a promise to satisfy your thirst, but they leave you still thirsty.

In the strict Muslim countries, which follow the law of the Quran, people live in the worst kind of bondage. The word Islam means submission, and it demands a complete submission to it. If you should decide that you no longer believe in Muhammad as the prophet of God, and you're living in that Islamic nation, you can be put to death.

And thousands of people have been put to death because they no longer believed in Islam. Bondage of the worst sort. I cannot understand a religion that would create such uncaring beast out of people that they can justify kidnapping and beheading innocent people without any real cause.

They can justify indiscriminately killing innocent people and often target schools and small children. Truly, it's a broken cistern. It can't hold water.

Buddhism is the constant quest for peace and contentment. And I say quest for peace and contentment, which they teach can only be found when you become totally dead to the desire for any material things, including food. As long as you get hungry and you want a hamburger, you'll never find nirvana.

You'll never be at peace and find the contentment in nirvana. In fact, ask a Buddhist, have you attained nirvana? And you won't find one who will say they have. It's a quest.

It's that searching for that. And the whole philosophy is as long as you have any desire for things that are material, you'll always have strife. You'll always have anxieties and fears and so forth.

They're all predicated because we have desire for physical things. So you have to become totally dead to the desire for anything physical. However, the Dalai Lama, who is, of course, the head of this religious system and the main living example of this death to all material desires, flies around the world in the luxury of a private jet, stays at the finest hotels and gathers millions of dollars from the people so that they won't be tempted to spend it on material things.

Another broken cistern that can't hold water. If you go to Jerusalem, there on the Mount of Olives, just a little below the Intercontinental Hotel, the road that swings around makes a U-turn there in front of the Continental Hotel. Just down from that, there's a flight of stairs, comes to a landing, another flight of stairs leads to a path that will lead you down to the Garden of Gethsemane.

But if you take this first flight of stairs, come to this little landing there, on your left-hand side going down, there's this gate. And on the gate, there's a sign that says, Tomb of the Prophets. And you can give the guy a couple of shekels, and he'll give you a candle, and you can go in and look at the Tomb of the Prophets.

Now, I'm certain that there was never any prophet buried there. But like so many of the traditional sites, you know, they try to commercialize it. And so, Tomb of the Prophets, but he spells it with a F-I-T-S.

He's trying to make a prophet out of the tomb. But maybe at the time of Jeremiah, maybe even before Jeremiah, someone decided there on the Mount of Olives to dig a cistern. The little hole is there, and you can go inside, and you can see this huge cavern that was carved out of the rock.

It must have taken years with those primitive tools of just a hammer and a chisel to chisel away all of the rock in this big cistern that is there. After years, probably, of chipping away, it's all set. He's built the little dams and the little rivulets to direct the flow of the rain water into this hole on the top to fill the cistern so that come summertime he'll have water for his garden.

And so here all of the effort. And you can imagine as it's all complete, ready to go, and the guy's just sitting there waiting for a rainy day. And finally the rain comes, and the water begins to flow down the Mount of Olives, and it follows these little sluices that he has made, and it dumps into this big cistern that he has spent so much time digging out.

And he goes out in the morning to dip his bucket into the cistern, letting it down through the hole, and instead of hearing a splash of water, he hears a clank. It's a broken cistern. All of that labor was in vain.

There was a fissure somewhere along in the rock, and the water all just went out. So what they did, rather than just waste all of the labor and effort, is they made a sepulcher out of it, and they started burying bodies in it. So as I was going through with my candle and looking at these various rooms in this once intended to be cistern, saw all of these little niches in the walls where they had buried people, and I thought, how appropriate.

Here's a broken cistern. Couldn't hold water, so what do you do? You bury the dead. And I think of how many people are buried in broken cisterns, buried in religious beliefs, buried in things that they have been worshipping, because we have to worship something.

On television, sometimes on the news, I'll see some concert in L.A. area or around the country. The rock bands are on the stage, the guys screaming into the mic, and, you know, the bands are feverishly playing, and you see all of these teenagers, multitudes of teenagers, hands lifted. You hear them as they are screaming out in the worship of their stars, because they've got to worship something.

And you see them dancing around, and they're broken cisterns. They're looking for something that will meet a deep need within, but these things cannot. Broken cisterns cannot feed your spiritual needs in your life, and it's a tragedy that today so many people are trying to find answers for life in broken cisterns.

Peter wrote, these are wells without water. That's what a broken cistern is. It's a well without any water.

He said, they are clouds that are driven by a storm to whom is reserved the mist of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they attract through the lust of the flesh and through much wantonness those who are looking for an escape from their living in error. And while they promise them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption, for by whom a man is overcome the same as he brought into bondage.

Empty wells, broken cisterns, for whom is reserved the mist of darkness forever. The worship of anything less than the true and the living God brings a person into bondage. Look how many people today are in bondage to their flesh, to the habits that have taken control of their lives.

No longer are they free. They're in horrible bondage, but Jesus has come to make us free. The water of life, it's a very freeing experience coming to Jesus Christ and knowing the full joy and contentment and satisfaction of being able to drink from the water of life freely freely that our Lord wishes to provide for each of us that He might slake that thirst that every one of us experience and know.

Because worship is a drive that you cannot ignore. You will worship something. Take a good look inside and find out what it is that you are worshipping today.

What it is that you are looking for to satisfy the need that you experience in your life. The sense of frustration that life must be something more and if I only had this, then I would be happy. If I could only attain that, then I would be satisfied.

And so we live in the hope that some new experience is going to answer the clamid cry of our spirit for a meaningful relationship with God, but nothing can until you come and you kneel before Him and begin to worship Him and then you will know what living is all about and what God's purpose and intent for our lives

is all about. It's all found in Him. The fountain of living water from which you can drink and never thirst again.

Father we thank you for that life that we have found in Christ. The life of the Spirit. Lord we pray for those today that are thirsty.

Trying Lord through so many different things to find meaning, only to discover that the cistern is empty. It's broken. There's nothing there.

Only the promise of something, the hope of something, but it's broken. Lord we pray that they might come to drink from the fountain of life, the living water that Jesus is offering to us today. In His name we ask it.

Amen.

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