

# A Tree Planted by the Water

by Tom Macartney

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in the Lord and living in fellowship with Him to experience spiritual growth and fruitfulness.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 25:4, Jeremiah 17:7, John 15:16, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Philippians 4:4

**Topics:** "Faith And Trust", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

Tom Macartney preaches on the contrast between trusting in the Lord and trusting in mortal man, illustrating the blessings of those who trust in the Lord as being like a tree planted by the waters, unafraid of droughts, evergreen, unworried, and unceasingly fruitful. He highlights the dangers of humanism, the decline of spiritual leadership, and the need for a life-giving ministry of the Word in these spiritually dry times. The sermon emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with God, drawing upon His grace, and being rooted in Him to overcome fear, remain evergreen, be unworried, and bear fruit continually.

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## Transcript

"This is what the Lord says: Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose confidence is in Him. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, that spreads out its roots by the river. It shall not fear when heat comes, but its leaves shall be evergreen; it shall have no worries in the year of drought, neither shall it cease to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17:7, 8

What a marvellous picture of the Christian living upon the inexhaustible resources and riches of Christ in this drought-stricken wilderness of a world! What a promise! What a possibility! How we need to enter into the reality of these words in experience in these darkening days.

Leaving aside the many cross-references to which we might turn (such as Psalm 1:1-3; Is. 58:9-11; John 4:14; 7:37-39; Rev. 22:1-5), let us first look at the contrast to these two verses found in the two preceding verses.

"Cursed is the man who trusts in mortal man, and depends on flesh for his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord For he shall be like a stunted shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in a salt land where no-one lives." Jeremiah 17:5, 6

What a contrast is pictured in these four verses, between the believer and the unbeliever, the way of blessing and the way of the curse, between the evergreen, fruitful free flourishing by the waters even in the year of drought, and the stunted shrub eking out its existence in the uninhabited, parched wilderness!

Let us briefly consider these verses 5 and 6, which open a window for us on the prevailing drought or spiritual situation today.

a) We live in an age of militant humanism and atheism, expressed in a glorification of man and his achievements, a blind confidence in man's ability to solve all his problems, and a widespread, open and defiant rejection of God's very existence. And this, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary--we are witnessing the breakdown of law and order on a world-wide scale and the impotence of governments to handle it--and science is ever creating more serious problems than it solves. The Tree of Knowledge is proving to be the Tree of Death for fallen man. The ever increasing, universal spirit of antichrist heralds the coming of anti-christ himself (2 Thess. 2:7, 8; 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). But, sadly, godless man is unaware of the curse under which he lies.

b) Then, what shall we say of the professing church? Jeremiah 2:13 says it all. "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

In the professing church, the true and living God, revealed alone in Jesus Christ, His Son, and in His Word, the Bible, has been very largely forsaken and substitutes for Him have been created according to man's ideas. And even in the believing church, among other dangers, we have the danger of following men, for the best Christian leaders, teachers and theologians are still limited and fallible. How easy it is to become a party man (1 Cor. 3:4, 21-23; 13:9-12), to belong to a school of interpretation in theology, or a group which majors on certain experiences, and so on. Even true believers can be sidetracked, without realising it, into forsaking Christ as the Fountain of Living Waters, their only true Centre, and substituting something else for Him.

c) We note that literal droughts and famines are sometimes linked with judgement in the Word (Deut. 11:13-17) and that our four verses are connected with a message from the Lord concerning the drought in Ch. 14:1-7, which provides a background to them. We remember the terrible drought of 3½ years in Elijah's day because of the spiritual situation (1 Kings 17; Luke 4:25), and the drought in Haggai's time because of the people's neglect of building the Lord's House and their preoccupation with their own affairs (Hag. 1:10, 11). We recall that drought and famine are features of the times before the Lord's return (Matt. 24:7).

d) We remember also that sometimes the Lord leads His people, 'through the wilderness ... through a land of drought,' through wilderness experiences in life, to test and teach and bless them (Jer. 2:6; Deut. 8, a very important chapter). "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). This is an O.T. equivalent of Romans 8:28. For trusting believers even 'the great and terrible wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground' is under His sovereignty, and serves His purpose in their lives (Deut. 8:15).

e) Then, of course, there is the tragedy of spiritual drought and famine. This world has nothing to offer the thirsty heart of man; the deceptive and fleeting pleasures of sin certainly cannot satisfy it. Neither, strangely, can religion in all its forms--indeed religion is a burden to be carried. Only the Lord Himself and a personal relationship with Him can satisfy the heart. David illustrates this again and again in his Psalms

(e.g. Psalm 63).

One of the most tragic aspects of spiritual drought is seen when there is a lack of a life-giving ministry of the Word among the people of God. It was so in the days of Eli before Samuel: "The word of the Lord was rare and precious in those days; there was no frequent nor widespread vision" (I Sam. 3:1, 24; 4:1. See also 2 Chron. 15:3.) And in Amos we read these solemn words: "The days are coming says the Lord God when I will send a famine through the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11-13).

The lack of spiritual leadership and living ministry and the condition of the people of God are always closely intertwined. We are suffering today from what we may call 'Scribalism'. This was the problem in the synagogues in the days of Jesus. It is written: "The people were astonished at His teaching, because He taught them as One having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28, 29). He spoke with words that were 'spirit and life ... the words of eternal life,' words that were 'living water' and 'spiritual food' (John 6:63, 68). Our need today is for living messages that not only instruct our minds, but satisfy our thirst for GOD. It has been truly said, 'Fundamentalism has fallen into the error of textualism, which is simply orthodoxy without the Holy Spirit.'

Let us now turn to the believer's portion of blessing in verses 7 and 8.

1. "Blessed is the man who trusts in Jehovah (the Lord)." It is important to realise that trusting in the Lord is much more than believing in God. His Name Jehovah signifies God made known to us and by us in personal redemption. Trusting in the Lord involves a real relationship with the living God--it is not just an affirmation of belief. A creed may be undermined and rejected, but not a real relationship.

2. "He shall be like a tree planted by the waters." Salvation is an act of God. We are planted by Him; we are planted in grace. In Isaiah 61:1-3, part of which was read by the Lord Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of His ministry when He introduced the new day of the Gospel (Luke 4:16-22), believers are called "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord." Our first need is righteousness--He is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). We are justified by His blood, and by faith we are trees of righteousness (Rom. 5:1, 9).

We are also planted by the waters. Through new birth and the indwelling Spirit, we have the inexhaustible supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, "A well of water springing up to eternal life," the living God, the fountain of living waters within us (Phil. 1:19; John 4:14; Jer. 2:13). This is what it means to be planted by the waters, the river of God is full of water (Psalm 65:9; 46:4; Rev. 22:1). "And from His fullness, we have all received grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

Finally, there is an additional picture in Psalm 92:12-15. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree ... they are planted in the house of the Lord; they shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and green." At first sight this seems a contradiction. In Jeremiah, the tree is planted by the waters; in Psalm 92 the tree is planted in the house of the Lord. Then we remember Rev. 22:1, where the river of God is in the city of God. Each picture enlarges and enriches the other. The Christian is not just planted out on his own by the river; he is also planted in the house of the Lord, in the church of the living God, in a veritable forest of trees, all by the river of God. We need to enter into the meaning of both pictures for our spiritual survival and usefulness in these testing days.

3. "A tree that spreads out its roots by the river." Here we see the importance of the Christian's co-operation with the infinite resources of grace. Faith must draw upon, drink of the inexhaustible supply of the Spirit. In John 15 Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you." In Col. 2:6,7 we read, "Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and strengthened in the faith." We must not only spend as much time as we can every day with Him and His word, but live in fellowship with Him all through every day. In Psalm 1:1-3 the man like a tree planted by the waters delights and meditates in the law of the Lord day and night; he is spreading out his roots.

4. The results of this personal relationship - trusting in the Lord - being planted in grace, by the river of God and in the house of the Lord - spreading out our roots in unbroken fellowship with Him - are fourfold:

(i) No fear of heat -- "It shall not fear when heat comes." Dry, exhausting heat can be a fearful thing. In Isaiah 25:4, a great verse for today, the Lord is said to be a shade from the heat: "You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm, and a shade from the heat; for the blast of the ruthless ones is like a storm driving against a wall." We sometimes say, 'in the heat of the battle.' The spiritual battle is increasing in intensity. The pressures of daily life are mounting. But this tree has no fear of heat, because it lives by the waters and has inner resources well able to overcome the worst heat. "Inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16).

(ii) Evergreen -- "Its leaves shall be evergreen." This tree always looks fresh and flourishing, never drooping. It is obviously alive; no stunted shrub in the desert here. What do we look like? Are we dry and drooping, or evergreen?

(iii) Unworried -- "No worries in the year of drought." In this world there is every reason to worry. Indeed, the world is sick with worry. Anxiety is a crushing burden. We are warned against the worries of this life in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:22). But Paul gives us the answer to anxiety in Phil. 4:4-7: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be evident to all. The Lord is always beside you and coming soon. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds In Christ Jesus."

(iv) Unceasing fruitfulness -- "Neither shall it cease to bear fruit." It is our destiny to be fruitful and increasingly so (John 15:16). There is no such thing as retirement for the Christian. Joseph's life was surely one of increasing fruitfulness (Gen. 49:22); Paul's closing years in prison were among his most fruitful, for this was when he wrote many of his letters. And, of course, it is in eternity that the Christian's greatest fruitfulness will be fully revealed.

What a marvellous picture? What promises! What possibilities! May we enter into the reality of these things in these darkening days as we wait for His Return.

"O God, You are my God; earnestly will I seek You, my soul thirsts for You. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power and glory." (Psalm 63:1, 2)

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