

Dear People of God,

“If you were a tree, what kind would you be?” I don’t know who dreamed up the question, but it has been asked of people interviewing for a job. If you answer *an oak tree*, you are strong and not easily moved from doing your job. If you answer *a pine tree*, it means you are flexible and can bend easily to take on new challenges. You can see why an employer might use the question.

Today we are interested in Jeremiah’s answer. If the prophet were a tree, what would he be? The prophet would say, *“a healthy one.”* Why? Because disaster and death were coming upon God’s people. Many of them were spiritually dead, like a dead bush in the desert. But there was still time. The Lord’s words are a call to repentance. **“Be the tree and not the bush.”** What does this all mean? I want to tell you, but first a thought.

This call to repentance is for you and me and the people of the world today. Many nations, like our own country, have large groups of people that are unbelieving. That doesn’t mean they are unspiritual. There are still many people practicing religion. However, people have turned the hearts from the true God. A shadow of judgement is hanging over our country and the nations of the world. But there still is time. The holy Scriptures say, **“This is what the Lord says...”**, it is call for repentance and a turning back to the Lord. Are we listening? Are we calling others to listen? This is important. Another way to state the Lord’s call is, **“Trust Me and Be the Tree!”**

1. Trusting in man makes for a stunted bush.

What made the Lord God so unhappy? The short answer is that the people of Judah and Jerusalem entered into an alliance with the country of Egypt. Our country has a lot of political and economic treaties with other countries. So what is the big deal? The difference is that the Lord God told his people not to do this. (Jer. 2:18,36) They were to trust in the Lord for their defense and for their future. They disobeyed the Lord and sought protection in the military might of Egypt. Through Jeremiah the Lord tells them that trusting in the strength of man makes for a stunted bush.

A. Rather than punishing them right away, the Lord graciously calls for them to turn from unbelief, to repent.

1. We are not to trust in human strength alone for our protection and life. Egypt was one example of what Judah was doing wrong. More and more the people

were turning to idol worship. They were relying on false gods and not the Lord. This was even worse than relying weak and sinful humans.

Today the world calls us, *“You can do anything you set your mind to do.”* The devil whispers in our ear, *“If you trust yourself, then you don’t have to spend all that time in church, Bible study, learning to trust Him.”* Like a toddler determinedly staggers through those first steps, we want to prove we can walk on our own two feet in life. But then when things come crashing down, we are tempted to turn to people, technology and even false gods for the answer. The Lord calls to us to turn back and not to trust in the strength of mankind.

2. The reason the Lord God does this is stated in the First Commandment, *“You shall have no other gods.”* He is our Maker and Provider. He does not want to trust or rely on anything in the way we are to trust in him as our God and Savior. If we do, it is a slap in the face.

B. The person who turns their heart from the Lord God is cursed.

1. The Lord says he is like a bush in the wastelands. This bush doesn’t receive enough moisture. There is little to no rain. There is no stream of water nearby. So it remains dry and fragile.

This is a picture of the believer who is not being watered by God’s word. They may not take advantage of preaching nearby. So they live in a spiritual desert. Outwardly, physically they may look fine, even beautiful. Inside this person is dry and sickly. Every believer desperately needs the water of the gospel, but some refuse it. The future is bleak.

2. **“They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.”** The land where this bush lives is a land of death. There is not enough moisture so it will eventually dry up and blow away. The only use for a dead bush is to gather the dry branches for a fire.

So it is with everyone who turns away from the Lord and the gospel. They are cursed to be spiritually thirsty and they never blossom or bear fruit. Eventually they go to the dust of death and to eternal fire. All this happens because they refuse to listen and remain in stubborn unbelief.

C. There are a couple ways we can consider this call to repentance.

1. How might you and I, who hear God’s word, turn our hearts away from him? I believe the most common way would be that we struggle with a sin that is a weakness. Perhaps we get frustrated with life, angry with people and we dive a little deeper into that sin. We start to rationalize, *“Well, everyone is doing it.”* Or *“God will just have to forgive me.”* What shows that we have turned from the Lord is that we don’t repent. Repentance is *“I am wrong. I have sinned. I*

need to change my ways with God's help." Only the repentant sinner receives forgiveness. We need to take his call seriously.

2. The other thing is that we may know someone who is clinging to sin and is not hearing the call to repent. True repentance and love for God moves us to do what we can. We pray that we have a chance to talk about true repentance and forgiveness. We can do this while there still is time.

Trans: As he speaks the Lord pictures an alternative to the bush.

2. Trusting in the Lord makes for a green tree.

Not everyone in Judah had turned from the Lord. Jeremiah trusted in the Lord and there were others. Some of them came to the rescue of Jeremiah when he was a prisoner of the King of Judah. You and I want to, by God's grace, trust in the Lord. The Lord tells us that those who trust in him are like a green tree. We want to be that tree!

A. These verses are a call to repent and trust. We hear it loudly in 7 & 8.

1. When Jeremiah and the prophets called people to repent, they didn't only warn them. They offered God's promise of forgiveness in the coming Savior.

What Jeremiah and the rest of Judah could not do--rescue themselves--the Lord would do for them. Jeremiah promises in 31:11, **"For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they."** The Lord would help them with their earthly troubles. However, they had bigger troubles. The Lord says in 31: 34, **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."** We need a rescue from sin, death and the devil. God does that through the forgiveness of sins. He would provide that through his righteous servant, the Messiah. In 33:14-16 the Lord promises, **"The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. 15 "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior."** Blessed is the one who trusts in Jesus, the righteous Savior. Blessed is the one who looks to Jesus' cross and understands that with the Lord there is forgiveness and a salvation from divine judgement.

2. Right now many Phoenix dwellers are missing the sun. But we don't miss the never-ending thirst of the hot summer. Even though Jeremiah and the believers were going to see the heat of God's judgement on Judah, they were not going to be spiritually thirsty. Because they were the tree planted by a

stream of water. Jeremiah had the promises of the Gospel. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, if you drink the living waters, you will never be thirsty. In our troubled, sinful world be the tree that is constantly drinking from the cool, refreshing waters of God's grace.

B. The Lord tells us that the tree bears fruit. He says, **“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.”** I am not a master gardener, but when a tree has green leaves and bears fruit, I believe it is healthy.

One way to look at this picture is to say that Christians do not wilt in the day of disaster, even in the face of Judgement Day. We are vibrant and fresh. We bear the fruit of good works, showing our love for God and others. We produce continuously. We enjoy doing so.

C. As we are called to repentance and as we call others to repentance, we have to remember that there are wonderful blessings attached to the gospel. We have forgiveness and peace. We have confidence for today and sure hope for the future.

A good example is Jeremiah. Outwardly things went from bad to worse. The majority didn't listen. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. Jeremiah was imprisoned for a while and ended up in a place he didn't want to be until he died. Was God unfaithful? By no means!

The prophet's job was to issue the call to repentance and to encourage the believers in a difficult time. He not only succeeded, but ended up helping us by writing a book about his experiences which we have in the Bible. He may not have wanted to die in Egypt, but when he died Jesus took him to heaven. He endured because he was planted next to the living water of the gospel.

Conclusion: “If you were a tree, what kind would you be?” The Christian answers, “A healthy one in the Lord.”

I believe a strong argument can be made that we are living in days similar to those of Jeremiah. Every day brings us closer to the end of the world and Judgement Day. There may be smaller yet powerful days of judgment on people's and nations before the last one. It is important that we are a healthy tree.

The streams of God's word nurture and strengthen. We hear about God's love in Jesus and our forgiveness. We know we have life in him. This good news builds our faith. This faith will get us through the toughest seasons. Be the tree that trusts in the Lord. Amen.