

Let me begin by asking you a question, and I’ll give you a moment to think about your answer before we move on. The question is, would you say that you are blessed?

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that you can know for sure that you are blessed. What do you think of that statement? It’s a way of testing where you are. Are you thinking, that’s not so staggering, “It’s possible to know that you’re blessed?” I came out on a Sunday morning to be told this? If you don’t think that’s staggering, you’ve lived a charmed life. The rest of us hear that and say, “Being blessed is possible? I hope that’s true.” Jeremiah is telling you it is.

The happiness that is held out by the Bible—the blessedness that’s offered by God—is not superficial. It’s not on the surface. It goes deeper. Jeremiah says the blessed person is like a tree planted by a river. Think about that image for a minute. This tree is subject to seasons—a cold winter, a very dry summer. This tree is not always green or fruitful. And yet, this tree is unlike many others. This tree has been planted on a riverbank, and its roots have access to a constant stream of water that’s there even when the heat and the drought comes. That’s the image. What’s the point? The point is this: real blessedness is found under you; it’s found where your roots are. Being blessed is more than what happens to you, but it has to do with a source for living that’s available. There’s an old saying that goes: “Two men looked out through prison bars/one saw mud, the other, stars.” What’s the difference? Same circumstances, same prison, same bars, what’s the difference? In the men. Living in blessing is only partially a matter of what goes on at surface level. It is much more about your roots and what source they are drawing on.

The Bible consistently tells us that a Christian is not just a religious person or a nice person or a person who does good things, but someone who has been rooted and planted into something outside of him or herself; someone whose roots have access to the water no matter what season it is. The Christian has been planted into Jesus, the Son of God, and that’s where the happiness comes from, even when—*especially* when—it’s a dry season and I’m in pain, but still with your roots down deep in Him you sense not the lack of pain, but an overwhelming joy that comes up and holds you.

Jeremiah teaches us that there is a blessing that is possible; that’s it’s a matter of the source, not circumstances; if you look for it in circumstances, you’ll always be unhappy; and it also teaches us that blessedness is always a by-product of seeking something more than blessedness. Seek blessings or seek rightness with God—which should you? If you seek rightness with God more than blessings, you’ll get both. If you seek the blessings more than rightness with God, you’ll get neither. That’s what Jeremiah is saying to us. That’s what the Bible is saying and that’s what Jesus is saying in the Bible when He says, “Seek first God’s kingdom and what God wants. Then all your other needs will be met as well.” (Matthew 6: 33, NCV) This is an invitation to say, “My #1 priority is to serve God, and if blessing happens, great!” And here’s the irony: the less you’re concerned about the blessings, and the more you’re concerned about Him, the more blessed you get. Aim at heaven, you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth, you get neither. Blessedness is a by-product.

Before, we were talking about the blessed man being like a tree putting his roots down into the water. What is the water? What is this source? I made passing reference to it before, but it bears repeating that this life-giving source, is Jesus. The water is knowing Him and trusting in what He has done for you. And when I say, 'trust,' I mean, the fundamental trust that Jesus has changed the way God looks at you. Because of Jesus, God looks at you and sees someone He loves; with whom He is well pleased.

God offers you this life giving water: He regards you as a dearly loved son or daughter. He can do this because His Son Jesus switched places with you. He lived perfectly, then switched places with you so that you could have his perfect record. He agreed to pay the full penalty for your sins, then switched places with you, actually dying the death your sins deserved, which means you do not have to pay the penalty yourself. He then switched places with the dead, resurrecting to eternal life, so that we will be brought out of our graves alive at the last day. And the wonder of it all is the Holy Spirit of God incorporates people into Jesus' life as a gift. He connects people to Christ by actually using water—water with the name of God in Holy Baptism. The water down there at the roots is baptismal water, which transfers the life of Jesus to you.

All kinds of things can be happening on the surface. Your tree stands through different seasons, and all the joys and challenges associated with each stage of life. Your tree stands through beautiful weather and vicious storms. There may be times when your tree produces much fruit, in the form of loving service to others, and times when the fruit has dropped and you feel dormant, or a need to rest. Whatever is happening "up here," "down here" your roots are fed by the life and love of Jesus, who switched places for you.

Whatever is happening in the treetops, you can be confident that you are completely loved in Christ. Whatever wind may be shaking you branches to the breaking point, you can be sure your sins are forgiven and buried in Jesus' tomb. In bad and good times alike, put your roots down and draw on the water of God's regard for his baptized children. That's how the leaves stay green even in the heat. That's how you can grow when the conditions are not favorable. You are planted by a stream of never-ending grace. Soak it up, draw it in, by faith in Jesus, your Substitute.