

How to Serve God and Survive

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Preacher: Ted Watkins

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of March 2001. The preacher is Ted Watkins. His sermon is entitled, How to Serve God and Survive, and is from Jeremiah chapter 17, verses 5 to 13.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. Now, sometimes we don't really know where our confidence and our trust is until it's not there.

It's like health. You just take it granted. You don't have it, suddenly you realise how important good health is. But there are all sorts of other things that are part of our life that we trust in.

They provide us with the confidence and the sense of well-being, who we are and what's important, our relationships with people, our reputation, our status in our job or in our community, the possessions that we have, outstanding among other people and particular gifts we've got of whatever they might be.

There are all sorts of things that give us security in our daily lives. And perhaps we could ask ourselves, what is it that if we lost it, our life would fall to pieces? Because we saw some of that, people come into our area and they didn't have the sort of things they'd had around them.

[1 : 21] And they struggled. And part of our task, whether they were Christians or not, was to help people begin to refocus and to see what was really important. We had to do this.

Maughan and I had to sort out some of the important issues and at times it was a struggle. And we had to keep coming back again and again. So our trust is in the Lord.

Our confidence is in Him. That's where there's strength and hope. Now Jeremiah was, well, his chaplain to the king really. You know the story.

It's not quite like somebody in England who can write down because the king didn't want him to be telling him God's messages. Previously, Josiah was king and he was one of the really good kings of Israel.

He was conscientious. He was a God-fearing man who loved God and did what God wanted him to do. But then he died in a hopeless battle with Egypt. And after a short reign of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim was placed on the throne by Pharaoh of Egypt.

[2 : 21] And one summary I read of this son of godly Josiah was that he was conceited, hard-hearted, and a wicked manipulator who had no compunction in killing prophets.

And this was the man that Jeremiah had to minister God's word and truth to, who had to say, blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

Now when we come to this word trust, the Hebrew word is really based upon the idea of refuge, to put confidence in, to find security in, trust.

And it was a thing we had to, first of all as I say, we had to talk to ourselves in that situation. But we also had to encourage others as well. One man came to us, broken by all that had happened to him.

He sat there like, and he was a broken man. His whole demeanour was one who was really crushed. His brother had committed suicide, wife had left him, children were in strife, and his workmates made life a misery for him.

[3 : 27] As all this poured out, what could we say? Oh, it's alright. Don't worry about it. Forget it. What could we say? He could not trust anybody in his circle for help. We were, as it were, his last hope to find some solutions.

And as Morwen and I listened to him, and we prayed with him, and we suggested that he pray too, and begin to trust God to see him through all of this, we wondered.

I must admit, we wondered whether we would see him again, whether he'd follow and do what his brother did. We put him in touch with another Christian that we knew in this area. But my last contact with him, after four years, was at breakfast in this mining camp, at five o'clock.

I had to be there at five o'clock to get breakfast. It was a bit hard, I tell you. But there he was, vital, alive, and he was pouring out to me, saying, well, I've got my direction from God today.

I know what I've got to do. I know how I've got to trust him today. And his workmates were saying, you know, this guy's been born again. He was a changed personality. God has done it.

[4 : 33] And all these other things, they were beginning to fall into place. And if Maude and I hadn't achieved, or done, or been anywhere else, but in that situation with that man, in the last four years, would have all been worthwhile, as far as we're concerned.

With nothing else achieved. Because he was a man, whose life had been turned around. We're just so thankful, for the privilege. Because in a way, we're just sort of spectators, at what God was doing there.

And it was a privilege, to be part of it. And he was a far better sermon, and minister, if you like, in that small community, than we could ever be. We were outsiders. But he was part of it.

And as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, you show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God. Not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human heart.

He put his trust, and his confidence, in God. And God did not let him down. And we saw that, and so did a lot of other people. Jeremiah was a man, who lived well before Christ, a long while ago.

[5 : 36] And his message, resounded through the ages. He also gave a warning, about the consequences, of not trusting, and not obeying God. In the situation, where he was, invasion was imminent, from Babylon.

But all the king, could think about, was how to manipulate, the situation. How to twist it around, in such a way, that he, personally, could survive.

The prophet Jeremiah, was speaking about, the destiny of Judah, and how deeply, ingrained in the national character, was corruption, and the redemption, the redemption of God's, covenantal love.

So hard, were their hearts. He says, Judah's sin is engraved, with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts, and on the horns of their altars.

Hard hearted, they were against God. Not merely, just a superficial sin, but something, that was ingrained, into their thinking. We see this, particularly in the king. It was a way, of thinking, and planning, without taking God, into account, at all.

[6 : 42] Does it sound familiar? God doesn't count. His ways, his will, doesn't count. But Jeremiah is saying, they do count. All of us, are accountable to God. It does matter, whether we trust God, or not.

We will all, be like Jehoiachin, accountable for our lives. It's a myth, today, that we can ignore, the decisions, and the consequences, of our decisions.

Jeremiah says, this is what the Lord says, Cursed is the one, who trusts in man, who depends on flesh, for his strength, and whose heart, turns away from the Lord. He'll be like a bush, in the wasteland.

He will not see prosperity, when it comes. He'll dwell in parched places, of the desert, in a salt land, where no one lives. We've seen those places. But it's not all negative. He gives hope.

He warns them. Their hope, is to turn around. There's no need, to go down that way. Turn around. Trust God. And it's not just a matter, of just believing, that God exists.

[7 : 40] It's a matter, of putting faith, putting confidence, in God himself. In James, it talks about, you believe, that God is one, you do well, even the demons, believe and shudder.

What is commended, is not just a vague, general belief, in a God, but a personal confidence, in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his God, and for the Father, the one, who cares for us, and loves us, and wants us, to have that confidence in him.

In the Lee Creek Parish, over the last few years, we've seen things happen, that we kind of felt, a bit like spectators, almost. Because God did things, people accepted, God's message.

There was a manager, in the Lee Creek area, who had begun, to follow God's way, before we came. He was having, a very hard time of it. And part of our ministry, was to be, a confidence, for him, and his wife, so they could share with us, and talk through, issues, and problems, and the things, that were happening.

He came, to the Bible study, not every week, because he was, working extremely, long hours, but his wife did. His manager, was very impressed, with the quality, of his work, and offered him, a considerable payroll, and in a mining community, committed to money, this was an acceptable, way to go.

[8 : 52] But he surprised, his contemporaries, and his manager, by saying, he wanted a day off, spend more time, with his wife, and do the things, that were important, in his life. It might seem, a very small thing, to many people, but it was a very, big thing, in Lee Creek, and the area up there.

He said recently, that the atmosphere, had changed, to his work. It was now, more accepted, to be a Christian. He still had to battle, matters of integrity, and honesty, and openness, and I guess, he wouldn't call himself, anything special.

But we say, he's a shining light, in a very dark place, and we're grateful, for what God, has been able to do, through him. Blessed is the man, who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence, is in him.

He's like a tree, planted by the water, that sends out its roots, by the stream, does not fear, when heat comes. Its leaves are always green, it has no worries, in the year of drought, never fails to bear fruit.

Travelling across, the desert areas, the Streslecky desert, the Sturtstoney desert, the Terrarie desert, I am continually, both of us, are just amazed, that out of the stones, and sometimes, a little bit of salt bush, there'll be a big, tall gum tree.

[10 : 01] How does it get there? How does the seed, get there? How does it grow, into a small plant? How does it develop, into a big tree, in those circumstances? Somehow you can see, across the desert, this big gum tree.

You know, it's a, to me, it's a mystery, and it provides shade, and you've no idea, how sometimes, a tree like that, on the road, is such a, a welcome sight, to stop under, and make a cup of tea, and have a bit of shade, in the heat.

And Jeremiah, must have, must have seen, something like that himself, because he said, the man who trusts, in the Lord, is like that. And out there, we saw people, who were trusting in God, in totally hostile circumstances, totally alien, to what you would think, would nurture, their, their growth, and their spiritual life.

One woman, had we visited, for the first time, just cried, and cried, and cried, to have somebody, to share with, and to open up, all those things, that had been there.

I sort of left more, and went out, and talked to the fellows, while she just shared, this time together. This lovely lady, so gentle, and so feminine, and so spiritually alive, and alert.

[11 : 16] And again, the last time I visited, there was a, she was just like, I don't know, how would you describe it? She was just so happy. There's so much, that I could fill in, about the background.

But things had changed, so much. So, so alive, so at peace, still continuing on. The problems, and the difficulties, had faded away. She was just like, that tree, in a desert.

To visit there, was like, coming under the shade, of a tree, in a hot, dry land. And there's others, throughout the place, I've just pictured one. Just here and there, are these people, and they appreciate, the time, we spent with them.

To, to have somebody, they can share with, pray with, be open with, and just share, all the things, that have been going on. Please pray, for a successor, for the area.

I don't know why, everybody's not rushing, to go out there, there's some beautiful people there. Fantastic scenery. I won't take you, I don't think, but there is, some incredible, yes, there's hardship, yes, there's difficulty.

[12 : 15] I wonder whether, somebody's being called, and they're not, wanting to hear. Jeremiah said, the heart is deceitful, above all things, beyond cure. Who can understand it?

I, the Lord, search the heart, and examine the mind, to reward a man, according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve. How we often deceive ourselves. We deceive ourselves, about what happiness is.

People said, hey, you know, are you happy out here? Well, happiness has a, a sort of a, superficiality about it, I think. Joy is the Christian word. Like, like Jesus, in Hebrews 12.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter, of our faith, who for the joy, set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down, at the right hand, of the throne of God.

See, joy, is really, being on about, the Father's business. About, doing what is, something eternally satisfying. Not just, superficially, for the moment.

[13 : 14] It's linked to pleasing the Father. Knowing that our Heavenly Father, has plans, that we're part of. We've been part of God's plan, for that area. And we, praise and thank God, for what we've been, able to see done there.

Perhaps God's calling you, or somebody you know, to this task. Nurture that calling. Be open to it. Water it with prayer and faith. Take up the challenge. I tell you, it's a very great privilege, to be part of it.

Just remember, pray for those people, in that area. Particularly the Christians, who sometimes, really struggle. Just remember, blessed is the person, who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence, is in Him.

Let's pray. Father, Father, thank you, that you call us, to be part of your plan, for the world. Enable us, Lord, to trust in you, as the fundamental trust, of our life.

Guide us, and be with us, and help us, Lord, so that day by day, we may know, that satisfying joy, that comes, from being part of your plan. In Jesus name, Amen. Amen.