

ROOTED

Jeremiah 17:7-8

7 “But the person who trusts in the Lord will be blessed.

The Lord will show him that he can be trusted.

8 He will be strong, like a tree planted near water.

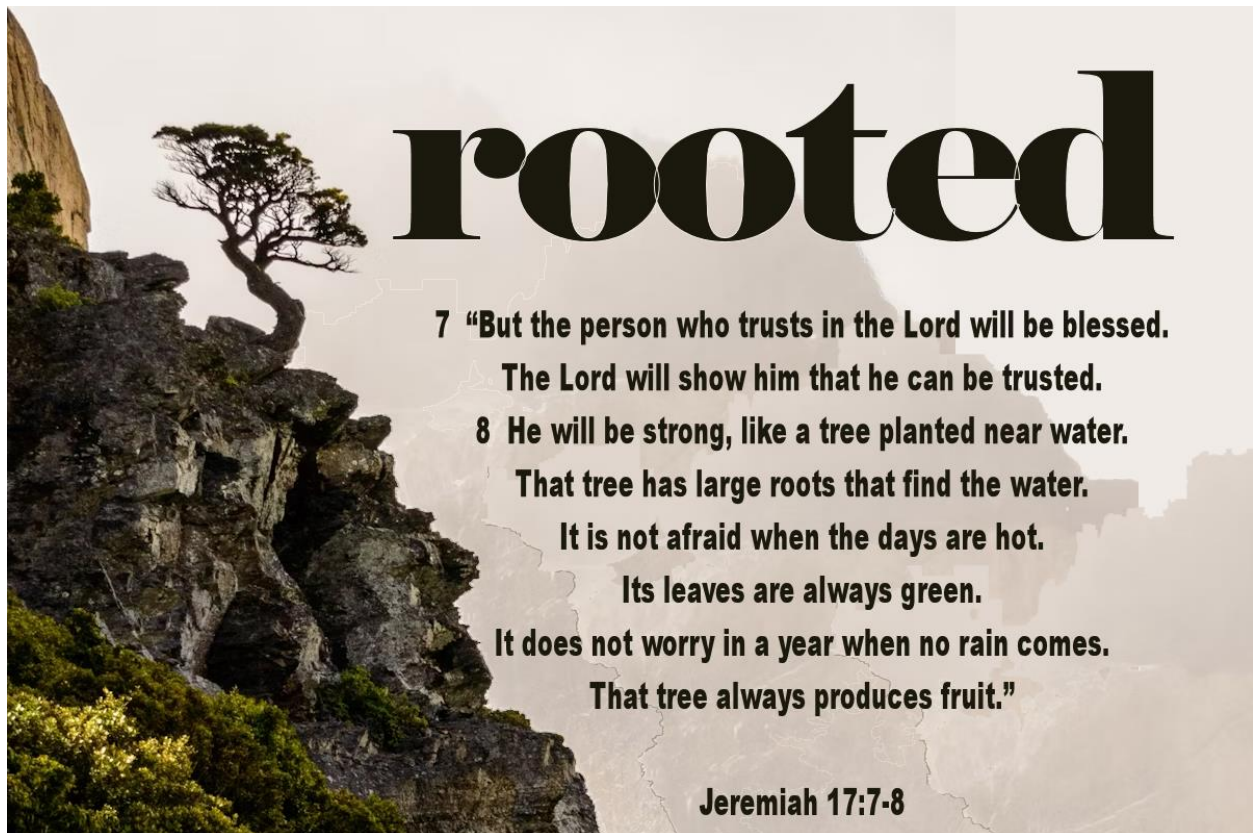
That tree has large roots that find the water.

It is not afraid when the days are hot.

Its leaves are always green.

It does not worry in a year when no rain comes.

That tree always produces fruit.”



Sunday February 16, 2025

Opening Hymn: “How Firm a Foundation” #529 vrs 1-4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAE_wsLn3bw

Special Music: “Rooted” Kerrie Roberts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9vtRgjL2c0>

Covenant Voices: Psalm 1:1-8 p738

Servant’s Hymn: “My Hope is Built” #368

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf3u0TbVz2c> vrs 1-4

THE TRUTH ABOUT ROOTS

Dr. Pauline Ringwald, the head of Emergency Medicine at St. Camillus Hospital in Ruskville, had just finished her examination of Doug Stillwell. Other than the few cuts and bruises he received from his rescue of Rachel Collins when he pulled her from the river, he seemed to be in good health. Dr. Ringwald had her nurse clean and bandage the cuts and then give him a Tetnis shot for his protection. Dusty had waited for him in the hall and Sheriff Thom had arrived with a clean uniform to replace the one Doug had managed to mess up during his ordeal. He still had not gotten his shirt back after he had wrapped up Rachel and sent her on her way to the hospital in the helicopter.

With the doctor's permission, he got dressed and opened the door to the hall. Doug was glad that Dusty and Sheriff Thom had waited for him because he had wondered how he was going to get back to Parable.

"You ready to get back?" asked the Sheriff.

"I'd like to check in on Rachel and her mother before I go if that's alright, Sheriff," replied Doug.

"That would be fine, Doug. I'm sure they would like to thank you in person. I will leave you in Dusty's hands while I head on back to the office."

"Thanks, Sheriff. I appreciate it," said Doug.

Dusty tugged at Doug's arm as the sheriff walked away and said, "This way. I'll take you to Rachel's room. She on the third floor and the elevator is right over here."

The elevator dinged when they reached their floor. They both stepped into the hallway. "This way, Doug," said Dusty as he led him down the hall and passed the nurse's station.

Doug loathed hospitals. It had something to do with the antiseptic smell and the muffled voices that surrounded him. He had done his fair share of field trauma in the military but found himself uncomfortable in a hospital setting. He would rather set a broken bone in a medical tent than spend time working in a hospital.

Dusty gently knocked on the door to Rachel's room and then opened it when Rachel's mom responded. Esther Collins stood the moment that Doug entered the room. She came over to him and gave him a 'hold your breath because I'm not letting go' kind of hug. She never said a word, but Doug understood how grateful she was. When Esther finally released him, he could see Rachel lying awake in bed smiling at him.

"Hello, young lady. My name is Doug, and I'll bet you are the one and only Rachel Collins, tree rider extraordinaire!"

The girl giggled at his words and Doug moved forward to sit at the edge of her bed. Only then did he notice the young boy sitting by the window staring down at the parking lot.

“I know who you are! I know you thought I couldn’t hear you when you saved me, but I did!” said Rachel.

Doug turned back to her and smiled. He leaned in to whisper in her ear, “Whose that young man by the window, Rachel?” he asked. “Is he a secret admirer?”

“That’s my twin brother Phillip, silly! He’s upset because he thinks this is all his fault. I’ve tried to tell him it’s not, but he won’t listen.”

“Do you mind if I talk with him?” asked Doug.

“Of course, you can talk to him. But I don’t know if he will talk back.”

Doug left the bed, grabbed an extra chair, and sat down next to Phillip. The young boy’s face was swollen from the emotional day he had experienced. He didn’t even look at Doug when he pulled up the chair beside him. Doug felt he needed a more basic approach to get Phillip to talk with him.

“Your name is Phillip, right?” said Doug, which elicited no response from the boy. “Listen, Phillip, this is a police matter, and I need you to be honest with me.” Doug was trying to sound authoritative but knew that it was out of character for him, so it probably came off as more nosy than authoritative. “Phillip, I need you to tell me what happened.”

Without looking at Doug, Phillip said quietly, “Are you the guy who saved Rachel?”

Doug nodded and then realized the boy wasn't looking at him, so he replied, "Yes, Phillip. I am the guy."

"Well, thank you. But I want you to know that it was all my fault. I am the one that should have wound up on that log, not Rachel. I was so worried about her. I think you should put me in jail. I deserve it," said Phillip.

"Now Phillip, no one is going to jail. But I do need to know what happened."

"Well... we were playing down by the river. And... well... we aren't supposed to play down there. Mom has told us to never go down there by ourselves, but we sneak down there once in a while anyway." Phillip looked at his mother out of the corner of his eye to see if she had heard him. "There's a big old tree that grows on the bank near the water. We like to climb on it. A while back I tied a rope to one of its limbs to help us climb up. It's pretty amazing to sit on one of the big limbs hanging over the water and watch the river run under us."

"Go on, Phillip," said Doug.

"You promise that I won't go to jail?"

"I promise," said Doug.

"Well, I got to thinking that since that big old tree never gave an inch when we climbed it, maybe one of the smaller trees would be just a solid and not so difficult to climb. So, I picked one out that was right on the bank and climbed it. I moved out on one of the limbs which wasn't as thick as the ones in the big tree. I

was about halfway across that limb when I heard a crack, and suddenly the limb gave way, and I fell into the river. I'm a pretty good swimmer and I managed to swim back to the bank, but when I got out, I couldn't see Rachel anywhere. There was a big old hole in the bank where the tree used to be. I guess it got pulled up by the roots and wound up in the river. When I couldn't find Rachel, I ran over to the big tree and climbed up, hoping I could see more. And that is when I saw the smaller tree caught in the current and Rachel clinging to one of the branches. She must have been holding onto the tree to try and keep me from falling into the river."

"And then what happened, Phillip?" Doug asked. Phillip's mother, sister, and Dusty were both listening intently as well. This was the first time that Phillip had talked about it since the accident.

"Well, there was no way that I was going to be able to reach her, so I ran back to the house and told my mom that Rachel had fallen into the river and needed help. Mom called Sheriff Thom. She was crying with worry. See? I told you! It was all my fault! All my fault." Phillip's tears began to stream down his cheeks again as tried to hide his face with his hands.

"That's probably when Sheriff Thom got in touch with me," said Dusty. "I rounded up some people and headed towards the river. But we hadn't gone far when I heard the call on the radio that you had pulled Rachel from the water. The helicopter was on its way and would be there long before any of us would arrive, so I sent everybody home and went to find Esther."

“I really thought those roots would hold, ranger!” shouted Phillip through his tears. “I really thought they would hold. I almost killed my sister.”

“Now Phillip, you couldn’t have known what would happen. But the tragedy was averted, and your sister is safe. Still, it was very wrong of you to disobey and disrespect your mother. This could have all been avoided if you had listened to her in the first place.”

“Phillip! How...? Why...?” said Phillip’s mother, trying to understand how everything had gone so wrong.

Suddenly everyone was talking at once. Dusty clapped his hands in the air for everyone to be quiet. “This is a hospital, folks. Come on. Settle down. Everyone be quiet.”

After everyone settled down, Doug was the first to speak. “Ms. Collins, the boy probably didn’t understand that the young trees near the river don’t have an extensive root system to hold them in place. Not like that big tree that sits farther back from the bank which has had years to grow deep into the earth. That doesn’t excuse his disobeying you, but I don’t think he intentionally meant to put Rachel in danger, and he did the right thing by running to find you and letting you know that Rachel was in trouble.” He turned back to the boy who was trying so hard to be brave. “Thank you for telling us the truth about what happened, Phillip.”

Holding her daughter’s hand tightly, Esther spoke out saying, “Thank you once again for saving my little girl, ranger. I can never repay you,”

“Yes, thank you, Mr. Ranger,” said Rachel.

“The girl needs her rest,” said Doug. “Let’s head back to Parable, Dusty.”

All the way back to Parable, Doug pondered the truth that roots take time to develop, to really dig into the earth and make a tree firm. There is so much that nature can teach us about how we need to live our lives, develop our character, and become rooted in truth. It is kind of sad that we generally have to learn that lesson the hard way.

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I spent the majority of my formative years in Fort Worth after my dad retired from the Air Force. While my dad was an excellent airplane mechanic while serving in the military, it wasn't really his calling. His biggest dream was to transition to become a farmer. The land that my mother had grown up on in East Texas had long been sold, but my parents sought out the current owner, made an offer, and bought that same 150 acres where she was raised. The house had already collapsed and was not worth restoring. The barn was held together with string and baling wire. I think the only thing keeping it upright was its stubborn refusal to succumb to age. You could only get to the land by dirt roads maintained by the county. There was no water where Dad wanted to put a cabin. Nor was there electricity. But my father put an idiot stick in my hands and I began to clear the Johnson Grass (which was twice as tall as I was) to make room for a cabin.

We spent many weekends working to make that dream a reality for my father. He brought in a one-room cabin made of aluminum. We worked hard

during the day, played 42 at night by kerosene lamp, and developed some deep family roots. There was a wood cook stove for both heat and cooking. Eventually, he had a well drilled so that we had water, even though it was so full of minerals it was hard to drink. He paid to have electricity brought in. He also paid to have the road tared to help with access. Together, my dad and I built a pole barn from a kit out of the Montgomery Ward Catalog. My dad bought a tractor and taught me to drive it. We planted an orchard and learned the lessons that come from calloused hands and blistered feet.

At the corner of the property, next to the road, was an oak tree. Not just any old oak tree. This oak tree was ancient. The trunk was wide and thick, and the limbs reached to the sky. It was impressive. And it became a focal point for the property. My dad hung a rope from a thick limb and built a tire swing for my sister and me. And every year in August, my mother's family would have a huge reunion under the canopy of that huge oak. The tire would come off the rope and be replaced by a huge black kettle. We would build a fire under the pot and my mother would make a caldron full of Hopkins County Stew for the reunion. The roots of that tree ran very deep, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That tree which had been there long before my mother's family had occupied the land, was a symbol of growth, strength, and stability for the entire Moss clan. That tree was as much a part of our family as any of our human heritage. Year in and year out, rain, wind, heat, or freezing weather, that Oak tree was a stalwart companion and a reminder of our roots.

There it is. That word. Roots. It means different things to different people. Sometimes, it's a location determined by events in our lives or the lives of our parents. Sometimes it is a reference to heritage like we find in the 'Roots' mini-series and the book by Aldous Huxley. Sometimes, it is an analogy for a profession, primarily one that is passed from generation to generation in a family. But there are commonalities in all these things. Everyone seems to want strong roots, deep roots, living roots, roots that feed the trees of our genealogy. Roots that feed both our reality and our imagination. Roots that bring us stability and keep the boat from rocking and tossing us on the rocks.

We have heard all our lives that God wants us rooted in him. But what does that even mean? After all, we can't see him like we see that big oak out in front of our house. Most of us want to be rooted in something tangible, something we can grab onto, something we can see, hear, feel, taste, and touch. When we think about being rooted, we tend to separate our spiritual selves from our physical selves. We tend to believe that we can be rooted in Christ and still be rooted in the world at the same time.

Romans 12:2 says:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

And 1 John 2:15-17 says:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

We can say that Fort Stockton is our home. We can say “I may live in Montana, but Texas is my home.” We can say we are Americans and call the US our home. We can call Earth our home planet. But when we step into a relationship with the Creator of the Universe, none of that makes any difference anymore because none of those places are our home anymore, no matter how much we want to call those places our home.

Paul tells the church in Philippi:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

We are citizens of heaven. Not ‘We will be citizens of heaven after we escape these mortal coils.’ When we attend the funeral of someone who has passed, we often hear the expression that the deceased has ‘gone home’. Nobody says they left home, only that they are going home.

Even though we seem to embrace this idea of heaven being our home, we seem unwilling to admit that where we live isn’t our home anymore. When we give ourselves over to Christ to be remade into the purpose he has prepared for

us, are we willing to engage with the idea that as his servant, as his follower, as his student, just maybe he has someplace else for us to do his work?

Paul tells the church at Galatia

19 “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Do we understand the nature of being a follower of Christ? That when we become rooted in him, he now calls the shots. If he says move, we move. If he says stay, we stay. By becoming rooted in Christ, we aren't just attaching ourselves to him. No! We are allowing Christ to transform us by making us a new branch on his tree, a new vine to his stalk, a new plant to his roots. One that is dedicated to serving him day in and day out.

But I want to remind you that it isn't the tree growing in the water or in the sand that is the strongest. No, it is the tree that sits back from the water. That extends its roots deep into the soil to keep the tree strong while being able to drink of the water. That's Jesus. Strong. Magnificent. Thriving. With deep roots, making him like a rock that we can always depend on.

We can't treat this world as our home if we claim to be Christians. We can't deny our roots in Christ if we are called by his name. Christ died to make a place

for us in heaven. We didn't do anything other than allow him to become our roots that will never fail. He teaches us that the roots of this world will eventually die and fade away, but his roots will never fade away.

Jesus has given us a new home. Not for later. He gives us a new place to call home the moment we step into a relationship with him. The old is passed away. All things have become new. Let us embrace what Christ offers and step across the threshold into the home that he has prepared for us. And while we are at it, let's grab someone's hand and take them with us.

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God bless you all!

AMEN

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