

## “GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES”

Jeremiah 17:5-8

### INTRODUCTION

1. Almost everyone in this room recognizes the name of Benjamin Franklin. He’s identified, of course, as one of the founding fathers of our nation.

He was the only person to sign each one of the following documents of American history: The Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Alliance with France, the Treaty of Peace with Great Britain, and the U.S. Constitution.

Benjamin Franklin served as the Postmaster of Philadelphia and became the first Postmaster General of the United States.

He certainly was one of the greatest Americans to ever live. Among other things, he invented bifocals, the odometer, and the lightning rod when he proved that lightning was actually electricity.

He was the first advocate of Daylight Savings Time.

2. You might not know that Benjamin Franklin was also the source of several famous sayings like,

*“Early to bed and early rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and...wise.”*

Benjamin Franklin – not your mother - was the one who said,

*“A penny saved is...a penny earned.”*

It was Benjamin Franklin who said,

*“In this world, nothing is certain, except...death and taxes.”*

But perhaps one of his most famous sayings was...

*“God helps those who help themselves.”*

George Barna discovered that 53% of Americans believe that statement is in the Bible. What do you think?

3. Well the truth is, that statement **is not** in the Bible at all. It appeared 250 years ago in Benjamin Franklin’s newspaper called, *Poor Richard’s Almanac*.

Eg. These words are actually a revision of a statement in one of Aesop’s Fables. In the story, a wagoner’s heavy load becomes bogged down in the mud. In his despair, the wagoner cries out to Hercules for help.

Hercules replies,

*“Get up and put your shoulder to the wheel. The gods help them that help themselves.”*

4. Isn’t it ironic a comment that comes from Greek mythology is considered by many to be in the pages of Scripture? Basically, it conveys the idea if *“I put my shoulder to the wheel, then God’s going to help me.”* 75% of Americans believe this...

45 So, what’s wrong with this statement? It conveys the idea that it’s **up to us** to determine our destiny and God is merely our assistant, not our foundation for life... He’s just “helping out.”

Eg. George Barna says it like this:

*“Throw in the widespread rejection of supernatural forces...and you have the makings of theological ignorance and spiritual chaos in which believers...are separated from the spiritual power that’s available to them.”*

In other words, this idea promotes a “me-centered” view of life ...not a God-centered view of life.

6. So, what does God really say about this subject? To help us answer that question, I invite you to turn in your copy of the Bible to the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 17 lays the foundation for our study today as we continue the series we’ve called, “*Mythbusters*.”

Next week will be our final study in this series when we address the myth, “*God cannot be a God of love since there is so much evil in the world.*” Next weekend we’ll enjoy some special features in our services as we celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our church.

Now, lets turn our attention to these foundational verses in Jeremiah 17 that help us answer the question: “*Does God help those who help themselves?*”

*“ 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 will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.*

*But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.*

*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”* (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

So, what do you think? Does God only help those who are self-sufficient? Does He promise to assist those who will not even try in life? Let’s uncover some insights today to help us answer those questions. First of all...

## 1. **GOD HAS EXPRESSED HIS COMMITMENT TO DELIVER THE HELPLESS**

One of the great themes of Scripture is that God helps those who are **unable** to help themselves. Look at this verse in Isaiah 25:

*“You have been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat”* (Isaiah 25:4a, NASB),

God is described like this by the Psalmist:

*“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families”* (Psalm 68:5-6a).

The Bible tells us that as Jesus walked this earth,

*“He saw the crowds...and had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”* (Matthew 9:36).

Eg. Do you know why our church is rescuing orphans in the Central African Republic? Because God is a God who rescues the helpless. Do you know why we sponsor an orphan home in Cambodia and why we’re launching the new orphan home in Thailand? \$35 a month- you help rescue a child.

Because is a God is a God who delivers the helpless.

Eg. People from Grace will participate in a cycling event this Saturday called, “*Ride On.*” The proceeds of this event will be used to support emerging missionaries from developing nations of the world who have the calling and the skills to plant churches, but don’t have the financial support to do that. You’ll find more information about that event described in your worship bulletin.

For the next two weeks, Pastor Dave Lawson will be traveling to the Central African Republic with a select group of American leaders. Why? As part of our “*Touching Tomorrow*” campaign, we made a commitment to our African churches to help develop pastors for churches without leaders.

Now, we can’t do everything, so why are we involved as a church in ministries like that? Because God is a God who promises to **deliver** the **helpless**.

Do you understand that apart from the rescuing work of God Himself, all of us are helpless? We might have money in the bank and clothes on our back and food at our tables, but apart from the work of God in Jesus Christ we are spiritually helpless.

Paul writes it like this to the Romans in Romans 5:6:

*“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly”* (Romans 5:6 NASB).

Eg. In moral terms, one philosophy of humanity suggests that man is basically healthy. Another suggests, “man is sick.” But the Bible says you and I “*are **dead** in our trespasses and sins.*”

Eg. Years ago, Cicero said, “*Man is a disaster.*”

You don’t have to be a student of human history to reach that conclusion. Apart from the deliverance of God Himself, you and I are completely helpless. The Bible says:

*“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

I love these words of Paul to the Corinthians:

*“Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us”* (2 Corinthians 1:9-10a).

The Scriptures portray God as a God who is in the rescue business. (John 3:19) He came to this earth in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on our behalf so we could be rescued...delivered...from the impact of our own sin. Because of our sin, we are spiritually helpless. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, He delivers us from the power of sin.

The old song says: “*He breaks the power of **cancelled sin**, He sets the prisoner free.*”

Eg. The very name Jesus means, “*Jehovah saves.*”

The God of the Bible is a God who delivers those who are incapable of helping themselves. He did that when Christ died on our behalf...and now He commissions those of us who have a relationship with Him to be in the rescue business.

God has expressed His commitment to deliver the helpless. Furthermore...

## 2. GOD EMPOWERS THOSE WHO DEPEND ON HIM

Someone said, *“In God’s kingdom everything is backwards.”*

Jesus said,

*“If you want to save your life...you have to lose it...”*  
(Matthew 10:39).

He said,

*“Give and it will be given back to you...”* (Luke 6:38).

The same thing is true when it comes to strength in life. The primary theme of the Bible comes from the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians:

*“I can do everything **through Him** who gives me strength”* (Philippians 4:13).

It’s the same idea that David conveyed when he wrote:

*“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but **we trust in the name** of the LORD our God”* (Psalm 20:7).

Somebody has defined *“help”* with these words:

*“‘Help’ is the cry of a mother with four children, 3 dogs, and 2 cats after a week at home while the husband is away on a business trip. ‘Help’ is the cry of a man sitting at a table of unpaid bills, hungry children, and an empty bank account with no job in sight.*

*‘Help’ is the cry of parents who have poured their lives into their children, only to come home one day and find a note that reads, ‘I’m leaving and I’ll never be back.’ ‘Help’ is the cry of a man who has watched his life go up in flames because of bad choices and the wrong crowd.”*

It’s not until we cry “help” to God Himself that He offers His help. That’s what Jesus meant when He said:

*“...Apart from Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5b).

Eg. The great Christian author, C. S. Lewis, wrote the series called, *Chronicles of Narnia*. In one of those books, called, *Prince Caspian*, a child named, Lucy, encounters Aslan, who represents Christ after not seeing him for a long while.

Lucy says, *“Aslan, you’re bigger.”*

He says, *“That’s because you’re older, little one.”* And she says, *“Not because you are?”* Aslan says,

*“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”*

Do you understand that statement? The more mature you and I become in our relationship with God, the more we will depend on Him. The bigger He becomes to us, the more He empowers us. As our vision of God becomes clearer, the more we learn to rest in Him and we learn to depend on Him completely, the more we know that He is able to do *“immeasurably beyond all that we can ask or imagine”* (Ephesians 3:20).

It’s that thought that caused David to write:

*“Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you*

*the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).*

God has expressed His commitment to deliver the helpless. God empowers those who depend on Him. And there is one more insight that answers the question “Does God help those who help themselves.”

### 3. **GOD EXPECTS US TO DEMONSTRATE GENUINE FAITH**

The Bible emphasizes that if you and I have been rescued by God Himself through the work of Christ it will show up in how we live.

The Bible says:

*“...The righteous will **live by his faith**”  
(Habakkuk 2:4).*

The writer of Hebrews says:

*“Without faith it’s impossible to please God...”  
(Hebrews 11:6).*

Paul wrote to the Philippians:

*“...Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”  
(Philippians 2:12b)*

What does all that mean? It means that if we have been delivered from spiritual helplessness by the power of Christ Himself, it will show up in how we live.

Look at these words from James Chapter 2:

*“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?*

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?*

*In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:14-17).*

This is why we have a ministry here at Grace called 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturdays. Some groups talk about serving the community once a year or once in a while. Every single month we are committed to serving this community through “2<sup>nd</sup> Saturdays.” We’re involved in visiting nursing homes, doing home repair projects for people who don’t have the money for those repairs, and delivering Christmas gifts at the holiday season, or entire meals at Easter.

We’ve established a presence downtown at “The Towers” where we’re involved in the lives of children who are disadvantaged. Adults from our church are using their skills to help children gain a new sense of hope. Do you know why? Because those who’ve been rescued by the power of God understand that we are on a rescue mission ourselves. Eg. Extreme gratitude of orphans in Cambodia

When we’ve experienced the power of God it affects everything about our lives. It even affects the way we look at our own work. Look at these words of Paul to the Thessalonians:

*“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle.*

*They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus*

*Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat”*  
(2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

- Real faith shows up in how we live!

## CONCLUSION

Eg. I may have told you about Robertson McQuilkin, the former president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary. While he was president, his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimers.

McQuilkin decided to resign his presidency of the school that had flourished for nearly 20 years under his leadership. He chose to care for his wife full-time.

Do you know why? Because he promised to love and care for her as long as they both would live... because he loved her and she needed him.

He knew that the school would survive under the leadership of someone else. But only he could serve his beloved wife, Muriel.

I pray that every young woman marries a man like that and that every young man becomes that kind of husband. That sounds like an act of great sacrifice, doesn't it?

I want to tell you that when we realize how helpless we are apart from the work of God Himself...when we realize what God has done to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness...when you and I come to understand how He has rescued us from the power of sin itself...it affects how we respond to those who are helpless around us.

That's what Paul meant when he wrote these words to the Corinthians.

*“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us”*  
(2 Corinthians 4:7).

I want to ask you something, has your own helplessness before a perfect and powerful God forced you to lean all of your weight fully on Jesus alone? Has your own sense of helplessness driven you to find full forgiveness that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ? Has your own sense of helplessness transformed the way you look at those who are helpless around you in this world?

\*Sang: “What can I say, What can I do, but offer this heart oh God, completely to You”

Until you are gripped by those ideas you will not believe the idea that God does not help those who help themselves...He helps those who **cannot help themselves** by the power of Jesus Christ Himself.

Eg. No wonder the songwriter said...

*“Jesus paid it all... All to Him I owe. Sin has left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow.”*

How would you answer this question:

- How does my life demonstrate dependence on God?

Sing- “I Need Thee”