

Tree Of Righteousness

Trees

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Given 25-Jul-26; Sermon #1886s

When it comes to something on this earth that man absolutely could not live without, a few necessities come to mind. Water probably comes to mind. But another essential thing for human life is the air we breathe. I think most humans would not last more than a few minutes without it. Have you ever tried to hold your breath to see how long you could do it? I tried while preparing this sermon, and I got 40 seconds. I was sick at the time, so that probably explains the low performance.

But it is amazing how our bodies were designed. Breathing is so vital to our survival, yet we do it mostly all the time without even noticing it. But also amazing is the design of this earth that God has designed to give us the breathable air that we need for our survival. According to the Nashville Tree Conservation Corps, oxygen makes up only about 21% of the Earth's atmosphere.

Now, what comes to mind when you think of oxygen? Plants and trees, maybe. Well, today we are going to examine trees and their importance to the environment, and we are going to see how they connect us to Scripture.

Again, Nashville Tree Conservation Corps states the following about trees:

While about 70% of Earth's oxygen comes from plants, algae, and other plant-like organisms, I did not know that just under 30% of the rest of the planet's oxygen is produced by plants on land, most of which comes from trees.

Now, they go on to describe trees as powerhouses for oxygen production and air filtration. Even though they play a seemingly small part in production, trees are vital in the process of keeping us humans alive. Being more than just agents of our survival though, trees are important to the landscape in other ways. They provide food for us. That is pretty important. They provide

shade and habitable environments for other species as well. They help in controlling erosion in the environment. Well-placed trees in a city landscape can actually lower temperatures. We utilize trees in our building projects and in our homes. In general, we as men and women have found many ways to utilize them in our lives.

Green is the color that we often associate with trees. Why were they not purple? What is wrong with purple? See, green is an interesting color in the spectrum of light that we humans can see. It is actually right in the middle, or close to it, of the spectrum, and is the easiest for us to see. According to the online article "Nature's Favorite Color: The Science Behind Why We Love Green," green wavelengths fall between 495 to 570 nanometers, which makes our human eyes very sensitive to it. Later on, the article states that the human eye can actually see more shades of green than any other color.

Additionally, seeing green has been studied to have positive impacts on us humans. Scientists have found three in particular. 1) it reduces stress and anxiety by reducing our cortisol levels when we look upon it. 2) it boosts our creativity with its effects on our minds, which has enhanced cognitive function and concentration when in a green environment. And 3) the color green fosters a sense of peace and recovery by stimulating our parasympathetic nervous system.

Of course, each article attributes this relationship we have with the color green and trees to evolution, each stating these benefits of trees and our inclination towards them are rooted in our ancestors' use of them for shelter and food. Basically, they were important to early man's survival. But perhaps God designed it this way. What if He intended this relationship between us and trees to teach us something?

How prevalent are trees in Scripture? Pretty prevalent, actually. In the first few chapters of the Book, you can see a word for tree mentioned more than 10 times. In general, you can find words for trees hundreds of times throughout Scripture. The amount of teaching related to it is astounding. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* shows its symbolism in a variety of ways. You have beauty, dependency, protection, strength, pride, judgment, and even idolatry. God did, in fact, plan out this part of His creation purposefully.

Please turn to Genesis 1. We are only going to read verse 29 here.

Genesis 1:29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."

From creation, it was man's job to tend and make use of vegetation, trees included. Thus, man observed the tree. They observed the characteristics of the tree throughout their lives. They utilized the tree for survival, and they benefited from it. God took these characteristics that man observed once He put them into His creation, and He applied them to teaching and guiding His people.

Now, one aspect that really stood out in this review of trees and Scripture was God's symbolic use of them regarding man. Not just men in general, but those who are of the family of God. As we have seen at the beginning of this message, trees are important to man, critical in our survival, and critical to the ecosystem as a whole. In man's eyes, trees are very important. God designed it this way, and we should take note when He uses it as a metaphor to describe man or compare to man.

By choosing this as a metaphor for man, is He showing man's importance to His plan? Is that an underlying lesson? Is man important to Him? At the beginning, His desire was revealed: "Let Us make man in Our image." He wants to expand and add to His Family. Thus, humans are important to that plan, but *only* because of that plan. Specifically those humans who can develop godly and righteous characteristics to be able to live in that Family.

Please turn with me to Psalm 1. I am going to read verses 1 through 3.

Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper.

Now turn to Jeremiah 17—not verse 9. We are going to go to verses 7 and 8, just before.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

In all of man's observance of trees throughout the years, we have noticed something about their survival, how they thrive. Typically, they need a good root system and a good source of water, and typically a good amount of sunlight per day. My father-in-law told me just before services that all the trees are reaching up towards the light. That is pretty important too. These scriptures we read draw on the necessities of the tree and relate them to our spiritual walk.

But first, in Psalm 1:1-3, it delves into what a blessed man does not do. It shows three negatives that are avoided: 1) walking in the counsel of the ungodly; 2) standing in the path of the sinner; and 3) sitting in the seat of the scornful. Adam Clarke had a really interesting take on this section where he stated that this is kind of like a progression in the mindset towards sin, and it is actually twofold. The first is in the words ungodly, sinner, and scornful. This is a progression from being unmindful of sin and God and ungodly, to active sinning in the sinner, and finally to knowingly and mockingly sinning in the face of God of the scornful.

The second progression is in the actions of walking, standing, and sitting. I saw it as this: first, the person walks into this decision of sin, meaning they still have a chance to walk out of it. Then the choice is made to stand firm in this path. The choice is being considered to stay there, but again they still have an opportunity to walk out—they are still standing. But finally, the choice is made to sit down, to all but confirm the desire not to leave the environment of sin.

Now instead, the blessed person chooses the law of the Lord. They delight in it and desire it so much that it is in their thoughts all the time. Because of

these choices, it then goes on to compare them to a tree. Not just any tree, but a tree that has been planted in a good area, a tree that has an excellent source of water. By being planted by the rivers of water, they will produce fruit. They will not wither, and they will prosper. Now this word for law could also be seen as instruction. So you could see this as a focus on instruction, and that also being like the roots of the tree reaching towards that instruction in the rivers of water. That is God's Word and His Holy Spirit. Now it is well supplied by this source.

The next section of Scripture we read was in Jeremiah 17, and it adds to this focus on instruction of our Lord. Is it showing a more mature tree? You ever thought about that? One that has learned from the instruction and grown to develop significant character traits of trust and hope in the source of the instruction? It seems to me to be the approach. The scripture in Jeremiah 17 expounds upon that of Psalm 1 in terms of the tree.

See, the tree is again planted by the waters of the river, but there is more of an emphasis on its roots, its root system. This tree has an established root system. It says that the root system spread out *towards* the rivers of water. Next, we see this tree in Jeremiah does not fear when the heat comes. In Psalm 1, the statement was that the tree will not wither. You could see that this tree in the psalm is going to face some hard times. It could be stressed by them, but it will not wither—kind of like a bend-but-do-not-break mentality. But this tree in Jeremiah seems to not even be stressed by the heat of trial. It does not fear it at all.

No, this tree's leaves will remain green, as that color we looked at earlier. What did it do for us humans? Well, at least two of the things: it reduced our stress and gave us a sense of peace. Well, what does it go on to say? This tree will continually have green leaves and will not be anxious even in a year of drought.

In our final comparison, we have the production of fruit by each tree. Now in Psalm 1, the tree will produce fruit in its season. This seems to be a future statement, almost as if because the tree is planted by those rivers of water, it will produce fruit when it is supposed to. Now in Jeremiah, the statement is the tree will *not cease* from producing fruit. The person has been producing fruit, and they will continue to produce fruit.

Now, based on these three examples, we could again conclude that the first tree is perhaps a newly converted or a younger person in the Way. They have chosen not to go the way of the ungodly, the sinner, and the scornful, and instead have chosen to follow the instruction of the Lord. While the tree in Jeremiah shows us someone who has been in this Way for a while, they are rooted in their trust and hope from following this instruction for perhaps a long time.

We focused a lot on ourselves and the trees in the Scriptures, but we must not forget a critical part of these verses: the trees have been planted next to the rivers of water. Who did the planting? And who is the source of those rivers of water? Our Lord is the source of instruction—our instruction—and He is the source of the rivers of water. You can look that up in John 7:37-38. It is one we read often at the Feast, and you can see where Jesus proclaims this very thing. He is who we can have our trust and hope in. Does He want us to become like these trees in these two verses? I wonder, does He envision walking amongst the green and producing trees in the future?

Turn to Isaiah 61. We are going to finish here and we are going to read verses 2 through 3 and end there.

Isaiah 61:2-3 "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."