

Palm Trees in the House of the Lord

By Mallory Patrick

Introduction

“The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree... Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright.”

— Psalm 92:12

Have you ever seen a picture of a palm tree, its stately trunk rising many feet above the desert floor, with its vivid green branches plumed out in graceful arcs? There is nothing for miles in every direction, and you find yourself wondering, “How on earth did that tree get there? And how does it manage to survive?” What is so apparent to the observer is the stark contrast between the vibrancy of a thriving tree and the desert’s lack of sustainable life in every direction. Such a tree has not simply survived its unforgiving circumstances but has grown and flourished. What is more, it has become fruitful, giving aid and life to any passersby who might have need. Obviously, such a tree is drawing from a source that earth-eyes cannot see; hence the palm’s indomitable ability to live in direct opposition to its climate.

The date palm was a common tree in and around Israel during Bible times and still grows there today. It was a cultivated plant during Bible times, but it could also be found in desert regions to fend for itself as best it can. It is forgotten by all but God, and it will die if it does not find sustenance. Yet its very existence points to the reality of a hidden source of life that cannot be seen by the human eye.

Believers are described as palm trees in the house of the Lord. In this we see that the Lord does not want us to just struggle to eke out a barely passable spiritual existence in a world bent on extinguishing it. Rather, He wants us to find life in such a way and to such a degree that we move past barely existing into overcoming and overflowing.

Throughout the scriptures, the date palm is referred to numerous times to describe the form of a believer who has had to persevere and fight through adverse natural conditions to find and continue to draw from the Lord. It is a beautiful picture of how such a believer is conformed to the image of the Son as he continues to choose Christ in the face of earthly resistance.

One Root

“...Rooted and built up in Him...”

Unlike most other trees, which have complex root systems that seek out nourishment, the date palm sends out only one taproot to search for hidden streams deep below the desert sands. Such streams are too far down for a man to reach by digging. The palm tree, then, in a distinct contrast to other types of trees, is supported by one source, one stream. Its entire being is dependent upon that one stream, and everything that the tree produces — the trunk, the bark, the leaves, the seeds, and the fruit, as well as the root itself — has come into being solely by the life of the hidden stream. It is safe to say, then, that the nature of the stream is resident in every part of the tree, for the very life of the tree is being derived from the stream moment by moment.

In the palm tree we can find no other roots seeking out different sources of sustenance, like so many Christians have today. It is not in human nature to draw exclusively from the Life that is found only in Christ Jesus. Yes, we Christians do want Christ living through us, but we want so many other things, too. Some believers desire power, others are driven by the need for financial security, and still others long to be an important minister. The sources we believers reach toward are as diverse as we are, and the more complex our support becomes, the more we mix our expression of Christ with earthly things, which is not as the Father intended.

Only Christ will draw solely from the Father; only Christ will send out one taproot. He is of a different nature than we are. To learn to draw solely from Christ for sustenance is to begin to be conformed to the image of the Son. Since this kind of conformity is God's plan for every believer, the Lord will permit our other sources to dry up. If God is drying up your hidden streams, then it is because He wants you to take your true form and send out only one root. He desires that you go down more deeply than you ever have before, to find His hidden stream of life that is a mystery to all except those who have found it. When the Father dries up our familiar streams and sources, He is trying to nurture the seed of Christ in us that will reach out to the Father for all sustenance. The Lord is trying to cause us to change forms, from an "earthly" tree that is content with any old stream and as many of them as it can find, to a "heavenly" tree that will only draw from the Life that is found in Christ.

The palm tree is an illustration of a believer who has been conformed to the image of the Son. As that believer learns to draw from living streams, he will find himself taking on the image of the Son. His entire being becomes defined and shaped by those living waters. It is a form that can only come to be by drawing from the life of Christ.

A Season of Training

This can be a difficult season to continue pushing that root farther and farther down, for the believer whose sources of sustenance have dried up will meet with a barren and adverse environment in the earth. The harsh, desert-like conditions require the believer to seek Christ in a new way. It is not that the believer must find a new Christ, but that he

must find Christ in a way that has been unknown to him up until this point, for the believer who has recently lost his earthly resources does not know what he was using to support himself until they are gone.

Again and again, the believer reaches out for those old familiar sources of support and satisfaction. Again and again, he finds dried up riverbeds that can offer nothing of what they used to. Once more, the thirsty believer must turn to the Lord and draw upon Him to meet His needs and desires. The Lord uses this repetitive cycle to wean the believer from his taste for earthly things and to train him to be utterly dependent upon the Lord.

Discovering that you need Christ will propel you into discovering Him to be more than you imagined. Finding Christ as your only source is a doorway into a whole new way of living, full of all the spiritual riches to be found in Christ. It is finding Christ in this way that will cause the believer to flourish into a palm tree.

Maturity comes from the consistent drawing from the hidden stream. Christians today equate spiritual growth with the acquisition of knowledge by the study of subjects, but true spiritual growth is the maturity that comes as we are conformed to the Life of Christ.

Hidden Growth

The date palm taproot went deep below the surface in search of a stream that would feed it. This means that as stately and impressive as the palm tree's appearance would be to the beholder, there was much growth underground that no one can see. What an appropriate representation of the believer who is learning to abide in Christ alone! What growth occurs during this time, what establishment, as the believer makes decision after decision to put Jesus first without any outward sign to show for it.

With the removal of his old support system, the believer draws more completely from Christ, the only source of sustenance that has been left to him. All the while, he is fighting battles that no one can see, winning victories that receive no honor from men, losing other sources that have been dear to him without having laid hold of a replacement for them.

Life goes on as usual, and as time drags on, nothing much seems to be happening. The believer may even feel as though life has passed him by, and that all opportunities for pouring our Christ will be passed on to others. The earth seems just as barren and miserable as it always had. "Am I getting anywhere with this abiding in Christ stuff?" the believer might ask. It is hard to persevere when it feels like a never-ending continuing that does not seem to be making a noticeable difference. Life is just dry and lonely.

Yet the believer knows deep in his heart that he is drawing from Christ as never before. What the believer might not know is that as he continues to draw upon Christ

alone, he is slowly taking on a form that is pleasing to the Father. The believer may not be able to see it, for it is a hidden growth – the growth of the taproot. But this kind of growth is indispensable for a tree to stay alive and flourish in the death-like conditions of a desert.

This is a time period in the believer's life that is void of human approval, applause, and compassion, for the earth is being made manifest as the barren wasteland that it is. There is no life-sustaining power to be found in the desert. Instead of being recognized and rewarded for some one-time step and decision you have made toward the Lord, your reward seems to be more of the same: a continual choosing Christ without anything outward to show for it. This hidden growth is long and slow and can even be heart-breaking at times. To the believer who does not see from above, giving into fear and falling into despair and unbelief can be a constant temptation. However, if the believer knows what the Lord is about, that He desires us to grow to maturity, he will continue to look for only one stream by sending out only one root to nourish itself only from that source.

This hidden, downward growth speaks of being grounded in the death of the cross. Such conformity and growth must be established before the believer will be able to be conformed to the image of the Son in other ways, for Life always begins at the cross for every believer.

This direction of growth is in exactly the opposite direction of where we would rather go. But the path to life and conformity always begins with the cross, and not only in acknowledging our death with Christ, but in our being made conformable to it. As long as we only trust that we are dead with Christ theoretically, the life of Christ will remain theoretical for us as well. But as we take on the form of the cross, we will be delighted to discover another aspect of conformity to the Son working in us – that of resurrection.

It is no wonder that the psalmist compares the Lord's people to flourishing palm trees! As we believers draw only from the river of life, we will find every part of ourselves deriving nourishment, strength, and even our very existence from it. It is true that the form of the tree is predetermined by the seed ("...the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth..." Gen. 1:11), and yet without that hidden stream, the palm tree would never grow to the height of maturity for which it was purposed.

Maturity

"This thy stature is like to a palm tree..."

— Song of Songs 7:7

Having the stature of a palm tree speaks of upward growth, in contrast to the hidden growth of the taproot. The slender trunk shoots upward in lovely, joyful defiance of the death-like world it inhabits, its regal achievement crowned with a graceful array of fronds

that gives the tree its largest volume in its upper regions as it reaches toward the heavens. This stature – or height – has been defined by being made conformable to Christ's death. This is the aspect of her form that others see while the root remains hidden to the natural eye. This believer forever remains grounded in death with Christ, which has secured for him a lovely manifestation of Christ in the earth. The believer's form is defined by Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and the believer delights that it is so.

Even though the palm tree is a manifest form of Christ in the believer on earth, his affections are set on things above, where Christ is seated. The downward growth into death has touched the living stream of life, and the result is a believer who only cares for dwelling with and pleasing the heart of his heavenly Father. Gone forever are the attractions for earthly sources which used to motivate the believer to draw from them rather than from Christ. Now, with the believer's sole source being Christ, his taste for earthly things has diminished and his desires, mind, and interests center upon Christ Himself. It is the form of maturity.

It is no wonder that Tamar, the Hebrew word for palm tree, was a popular name for women! When Solomon describes the Shulamite as a palm tree, he is speaking of the form of the believer in maturity. His bride has been maturing in their relationship of oneness, and she has taken on the form of a heavenly tree, with only one root, which root draws only from her Beloved. Solomon is pleased with her beauty, for her form is beautiful to Him. How must our Solomon long for such a relationship with His bride! How must He wish that we would grow up into the form that will please Him!

Fruitfulness

Finally, after many years of growth, the maturity of the tree takes on a visible form as fruit. Maturity is a hidden work that no one can perceive but those who see through God's eyes. Only He knows what transpires in the hearts of His own who have chosen to detach themselves from earthly streams that they might only live from His life. That palm tree, who has labored for years and years just to survive the harsh conditions of the desert has suddenly become that which gives sustenance to others. The dates are a highly nourishing fruit that was a regular part of the diet for the children of Israel. The sap is used to make beverages, and the nectar of the flower is described as honey in the scriptures. Even the seeds were used to feed livestock.

The fruit of the mature believer is Christ in the form which hungry hearts are able to feed upon. The taproot drawing from the hidden stream is conformity to the Son, but it is not an edible form. The growth above ground speaks of the stature of Christ, but no part of the trunk or leaves are edible. Only Christ in the form of fruit will nourish and sustain others. When the believer begins to manifest Christ in a form that others can feed upon and be sustained, the Lord's palm tree has gone beyond flourishing and has become fruitful.

Not only is the tree good for food, however. Almost the entire tree is useful for daily life. Its leaves were woven to make household items, and leaf fibers were used as

thread for sewing. The bark was used to make rope, and the trunk for timber. In short, the entire tree was useful for the sustenance of others because the entire tree had been nourished by that one living stream.

This world is like a desert. There is no hope, no love, no mercy or forgiveness, except what the Lord's people bring into it. But because we can draw from the streams of Christ, we have an endless supply of what the world does not have. The nature of the stream is resident in every part of the tree, so all the fullness of Christ can steadily flow through us, regardless of our living conditions.

Life sustained by its hidden source will always manifest fruitfulness in a dry land. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ is the source of such a believer, for he has received the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. The earth is desert-like in contrast to the richness of the risen Christ. The manifest fruitfulness of the believer is quite a contrast to his barren and arid surroundings, for such a believer behaves as though he is living in a lush, well-tended garden, and so he is since he is "the planting of the Lord" (Isa. 61:3). Those who are hungry for more of Jesus will gather around the Lord's palm trees to meet their own spiritual needs, and they will find that every part of those trees useful for sustenance of life and survival in a harsh climate.

Dwelling Among His Palm Trees

"And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, within and without... The two doors also were of olive tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubim, and upon the palm trees... And he carved on them cherubim and palm trees and open flowers; and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work."

— I Kings 6:29, 32, 35

How lovely it is that the Lord delights to dwell in the midst of those who have so deeply experienced the human side of learning Christ. To take on the image of a palm tree is a long and difficult process. There are pain and sorrow along the way. During times such as these, a believer does not look very spiritual or mature in his own eyes. He is repeatedly confronted with loss and lowliness as his root system, reaching out for nourishment – any nourishment – is denied. Then, in the dark hours of decision, in the valley crossroads, that believer draws from Christ. And while he resigns himself to acknowledging his own frailty, while he humbly turns to drawing from the stream that is Christ, the Father is rejoicing to behold one of His own taking on the image of the Son.

This is where the Father dwells. It is where He wants to be. Where we see human endurance give way to loss and a mighty root system dry up, He sees a place to live: a heavenly temple, a holy habitation.

Palm trees were carved on the walls of both the holy place and the Holy of holies, which walls were overlaid with gold. The doors to the inner and outer sanctuaries were

carved with palm trees, and the carvings were filled with gold. Gold speaks of deity, and all of the carvings were filled with it. This pattern of a palm tree is carved out of our humanity, leaving room to be filled with the glory of God. The divine nature fills such a form, such a pattern. When Christ is formed in us, we take on the form of a palm tree, and that form is conducive to facilitating the flow of Christ through the believer.

God does not dwell in one palm tree; He dwells among many. Those who have this form have gathered in Christ with others of the same form, and they make up the dwelling place of God. This speaks of a corporate relationship that the church has with God. Let us note, however, that the stature of the mature fruit-bearing palm is not acquired at new birth, but grown into over time. Those palms among which God dwells have entered into a mature relationship with the Lord.

Did you think you were the only one experiencing this process? That no one knows what you are going through, that no one understands the decisions in the night and precious growth in Christ being overlooked by others? The Lord's house is built with many such as these, all of whom have had to fight through the same harsh elements as you have to tap into Christ, all of whom have taken on that heavenly form, and all of whom are now filled and flow with the divine nature of God. This is a Spiritual relationship, and those who are palm trees have taken up a spiritual form. God dwells among them because they draw from the rivers of living water.

This is not to say, of course, that there are categories or classes of believers, or that there are levels of knowledge to which we must attain before God can dwell among us. Christ dwells in every single believer no matter what the degree of spiritual knowledge. What we are speaking of here is believers being worked into a form that can give a full expression of Christ. We must admit to the fact that even though the Lord lives in the heart of every single believer, the corporate dwelling place of God is little known and little spoken of in the church world today. Perhaps it is because so many believers have complex root systems that draw from many sources. Perhaps it is because so many believers find nourishment from many different streams, which in turn leads to a mixed life, a mixing of flesh and spirit.

Cherubim and Palm Trees

In contrast to the progressive, experiential, and human journey of one who is taking on the image of the palm tree, the cherubim speak of our relationship to God by Christ that has nothing to do with the created realm at all. In the new creation, there are no ties to earth in form, progress, maturity, or manifestation. The cherubim speak of an everlasting state of completion by the cross in resurrection. It is our form as we live in Christ, who is in the bosom of the Father. Instead of progression, there is only fullness. Instead of experience, there is reality. Instead of conformity, there is completion. The cherubim are otherworldly in that they are only heavenly. It is the new creation that came up out of the grave and is now found in and around the throne of the Lamb. Here there is no labor against the resistance of earthly elements, no need for endurance and

perseverance, for the new creation is the Lord's sabbath. The cherubim speak of the spiritual, victorious, overcoming, ascendant reality that is finished in Christ.

Cherubim do not touch the earth. They are only found in heaven around the throne. They have no history in the earth, and therefore have no earthly baggage or problems. They have no experience of relationship apart from resurrection. They do not need to manifest to be complete. They ever are what they are and do not change.

The palm trees, on the other hand, have relationship to the earth. They defy the elements and desert-like conditions of the material world. The Lord's righteous palm trees have grown into their form through understanding and are manifesting a Life that is impossible by earthly standards, to the confoundedness of all who are bound by earthly living.

The palm tree speaks of growth, maturity, and manifestation. It has to fight through adverse conditions. It pushes through the ground, which pushes back. These are aspects that the reality of the cherubim do not touch because they are only heavenly in nature and never interact with the earth. It takes the form of the palm tree to permit the glory of God to be made manifest in these ways.

When a believer finally breaks through to streams of life, he will benefit everybody. Cherubim do not really benefit anybody on the earth. Their relationship is with the Lamb on the throne. If you are in need, a palm tree is where you need to go. It will have what you need. It is no wonder that the psalmist compares the Lord's people to flourishing palm trees! As we believers draw only from the river of life, we will find every part of ourselves deriving nourishment, strength, and even our very existence from it. It is true that the form of the tree is predetermined by the seed ("...the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth..." Gen. 1:11), and yet without that hidden stream, the palm tree would never grow to the height of maturity for which it was purposed.

The Lord dwells in the midst of both His cherubim and His palm trees. Both speak of our relationship with God in Christ. We are a new creation in Christ. But we have also grown in knowledge and understanding and so have taken on the form of the palm tree. The palm trees bring the glory of God into the earth by being a benefit and blessing to others.

Conclusion

It is easy for us to understand that God dwells among the cherubim, but God does not only dwell among the cherubim. He dwells among His palm trees, as well, for we are both. In Christ, we are the new creation. As Christ is formed in us, we are the Lord's palm trees. The Lord dwells in both: the complete work to which we have no contribution to make but to enter in, and the form which we have assumed over a long period of time and many decisions.

Believers must grow into the form of a palm tree. The arid existence promotes the conditions necessary for the taproot to find living waters. The Lord is trying to get us to draw from streams of life. It is out of love that He removes other sources and makes you feel as though the harsh elements of our world are pressing in on you. He would not do this if He did not think you could find Christ as the living stream. As you grapple with the conditions of barren earth, you will find Christ as living water. Once you do and begin to thrive, you will be able to sustain others. This is the glory of God made manifest in earth.

It is important for the believer who is searching for the hidden stream of Life that the Father is about something much greater than taking away the things you want and need. No, He is making something, and it is a holy and fearful work. Do not take it lightly that He desires for you to learn to draw from Christ and nothing else. What will happen within you is a work of eternal proportions, for you are being made into a vessel through whom Christ can easily flow. Let Christ become all that you need and are, and you will never regret having allowed Christ to have the preeminence.