

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CHRIST THE TREE OF LIFE.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”—Revelation xxii. 2.*

You will remember that, in the first paradise, there was a tree of life in the midst of the garden. When Adam had offended, and was driven out, God said, “Lest he put forth his hand, and take of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever, therefore the Lord God drove out the man.” It has been supposed, by some, that this tree of life in the garden of Eden was intended to be the means of continuing man in immortality, that his feeding upon it would have supported him in the vigour of unfailing youth, preserved him from exposure to decay, and imparted, by a spiritual regeneration, the seal of perpetuity to his constitution. I do not know about that. If it were so, I can understand the reason why God would not have the first man, Adam, become immortal in the lapsed state he was then in, but ordained that the old nature should die, and that the immortality should be given to a new nature, which should be formed under another leadership, and quickened by another Spirit.

The text tells us that, in the centre of the new paradise, the perfect paradise of God, from which the saints shall never be driven, seeing it is to be our perpetual heritage, there is also a tree of life. But here we translate the metaphor; we do not understand that tree to be literal. We believe our Lord Jesus Christ to be none

* Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon, upon the same text, is No. 1,233 in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, “Healing Leaves.”

other than that tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. We can scarcely conceive of any other interpretation, as this seems to us to be so full of meaning, and to afford us such unspeakable satisfaction.

At any rate, beloved, if this be not the absolute purpose of the sublime vision that John saw, it is most certainly true that our Lord Jesus Christ is life from the dead, and life to his own living people. He is all in all to them; and by him, and by him alone, must their spiritual life be maintained. We are right enough, then, in saying that Jesus Christ is a tree of life, and we shall so speak of him in the hope that some may come and pluck of the fruit, and eat and live for ever. Our desire shall be so to use the sacred allegory that some poor dying soul may be encouraged to lay hold on eternal life by laying hold on Jesus Christ.

First, *we shall take the tree of life in the winter with no fruit on it*; secondly, *we shall try to show you the tree of life budding and blossoming*; and, thirdly, *we shall endeavour to show you the way to partake of its fruits*.

I. And first, my brethren, I have to speak to you of JESUS CHRIST, THE TREE OF LIFE IN THE WINTER.

You will at once anticipate that I mean, by this figure, to describe *Jesus in his sufferings*, in his dark wintry days, when he did hang upon the cross, and bleed, and die; when he had no honour from men, and no respect from any; when even God the Father hid his face from him for a season, and he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. My dear friends, you will never see the tree of life aright unless you first look at the cross. It was there that this tree gathered strength to bring forth its after-fruit. It was there, we say, that Jesus Christ, by his glorious merits and his wondrous work achieved upon the cross, obtained power to become the Redeemer of our souls, and the Captain of our salvation.

Come with me, then, by faith, to the foot of the little mound of Calvary, and let us look up and see this thing that came to pass. Let us turn aside as Moses did when the bush burned, and see this great sight. It is the greatest marvel that ever earth, or hell, or heaven beheld, and we may well spend a few minutes in beholding it.

Our Lord Jesus, the ever-living, the immortal, the eternal, became man, and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and died the death of the cross. That death was not on his own account. His humanity had no need to die. He might have lived on, and have seen no death if so he had willed. He had committed no offence, no sin, and therefore no punishment could fall upon him.

"For sins not his own
He died to atone."

Every pang upon the cross was substitutionary; and for you, ye sons of men, the Prince of glory bled, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring you to God. There was no smart for himself, for his Father loved him with a love ineffable; and he deserved no blows

from his Father's hand, but his smarts were for the sins of his enemies, for your sins and mine, that by his stripes we might be healed, and that through his wounds reconciliation might be made with God.

Think, then, of the Saviour's death upon the cross. Mark ye well that *it was an accursed death*. There were many ways by which men might die, but there was only one death which God pronounced to be accursed. He did not say, "Cursed is he that dies by stoning, or by the sword, or by a millstone being fastened about his neck, or by being eaten of worms," but it was written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." By no other death than that one, which God did single out as the death of the accursed, could Jesus Christ die. Admire it, believer, that Jesus Christ should be made a curse for us. Admire, and love; let your faith and your gratitude blend together.

It was a death *of the most ignominious kind*. The Roman law subjected only felons to it, and I believe not even felons unless they were slaves. A freed Roman must not so die, nor a subject of any of the kingdoms that Rome had conquered, but only the slave who was bought and sold in the market could be put to this death. The Jews counted Jesus worthy to be sold as a slave, and then they put him to a slave's death for you.

Besides, they added to the natural scorn of the death *their own ridicule*. Some passed by, and wagged their heads. Some stood still, and thrust out their tongues at him. Others sat down, and watched him there, and satisfied their malice and their scorn. He was made the centre of all sorts of ridicule and shame. He was the drunkard's song, and even they that were crucified with him reviled him. And all this he suffered for us. Our sin was shameful, and he was made to be a shame for us. We had disgraced ourselves, and dishonoured God, and therefore Jesus was joined with the wicked in his death, and made as vile as they.

Besides, *the death was exceedingly painful*. We must not forget the pangs of the Saviour's body, for I believe, when we begin to depreciate the corporeal sufferings, we very soon begin to drag down the spiritual sufferings too. It must be a fearful death by which to die, when the tender hands and feet are pierced, and when the bones are dislocated by the jar of erecting the cross, and when the fever sets in, and the mouth becomes hot as an oven, and the tongue is swollen in the mouth, and the only moisture given is vinegar mingled with gall. Ah, beloved! the pangs that Jesus knew, none of us can guess. We believe that Hart has well described it when he says that he bore—

"All that incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, and none to spare."

You cannot tell the price of griefs, and groans, and sighs, and heart-breaking, and soul-tearings, and rendings of the spirit, which Jesus had to pay that he might redeem us from our iniquities.

It was a lingering death. However painful a death may be, it is always satisfactory to think that it is soon over. When a man is hanged, after our English custom, or the head is taken from the body, the pain may be great for the instant, but it is soon over and gone. But in crucifixion a man lives so long that, when Pilate heard that the Saviour was dead, he marvelled that he was dead already. I remember hearing a missionary say that he saw a man in Burmah crucified, and that he was alive two days after having been nailed to the cross; and I believe there are authenticated stories of persons who have been taken down from the cross after having hung for forty-eight hours, and after all have had their wounds healed, and have lived for years. It was a lingering death that the Saviour had to die.

O my brethren, if you put these items together, they make up a ghastly total, which ought to press upon our hearts,—if we are believers, in the form of grateful affection, or if we are unbelievers, provoking us to shame that we do not love him who loved the sons of men so much.

And the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for us, we must also add, was penal. He died the death of the condemned. Perhaps most men would feel this to be the worst feature; for, if a man shall die by never so painful a death, if it be accidental, it misses the sting which must come into it if it be caused by law, and especially if it be brought by sin, and after sentence has been passed in due form. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ was condemned by the civil and ecclesiastical tribunals of the country to die. And what was more, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." Jesus Christ died without any sin of his own, yet he died a penal death, because our sins were counted as his. He took upon him our iniquities as though they were his own, and then, being found in the sinner's place, he suffered, as if he had been a sinner, the wrath that was due for sin.

Beloved, I wish it were in my power to set forth Christ crucified,—Christ visibly crucified amongst you! Oh, that I could so paint him that the eyes of your heart could see him! I wish that I could make you feel the dolour of his griefs, and sip that bitter cup which he had to drain to the dregs. But if I cannot do this, it shall suffice me to say that *that death is the only hope for sinners.* Those wounds of his are the gates to heaven. The smarts and sufferings of Immanuel are the only expiatory sacrifice for human guilt. O ye who would be saved, turn your eyes hither! Look unto him, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. There is life in a look at him; but there is life nowhere else. Despise him, and you perish. Accept him, and you shall never perish, neither shall all the powers of hell prevail against you. Come, guilty souls! Jesus wants not your tears or your blood; his tears can cleanse you; his blood can purify you. If your heart be not as broken as you would have it, it is his broken heart, not yours, that shall merit heaven for you. If you cannot be what you would, he was for you what God would have him to be. God is contented with him, so be you also contented with him; and come

and trust him. Oh, now may delays be over, and difficulties all be solved, and just as you are, without one plea, but that the Saviour bled, come to your heavenly Father, and you shall be "accepted in the Beloved."

Thus, then, Jesus Christ hanging on the cross is the tree of life in its winter time.

II. And now let me show you, as I may be enabled, THAT SELFSAME TREE OF LIFE WHEN IT HAD BLOSSOMED AND BROUGHT FORTH FRUIT.

There he stands,—Jesus,—still the same Jesus,—and yet how changed! The same Jesus, but clothed with honour instead of shame, able now to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. My text says of this tree that it bears "twelve manner of fruits." I suppose that is intended to signify that a perfect and complete assortment of all supplies for human necessities is to be found in Christ,—all sorts of mercies for all sorts of sinners; all kinds of blessings to suit all kinds of necessities. We read, of the palm tree, that every bit of it is useful, from its root to its fruit. So is it with the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing in him that we could afford to do without. There is nothing about Jesus that is extraneous or superfluous. You can put him to use in every part, in every office, in every relationship.

A tree of life is for food. Some trees yield rich fruit. Adam in the garden lived only on the fruit of the garden. *Jesus Christ is the food of his people*, and what dainties they have! What satisfying food, what plenteous food, what sweet food, what food precisely suitable to all the wants of their souls Jesus is! As for manna, it was angels' food; but what shall I say of Christ? He is more than that, for—

"Never did angels taste above,
Redeeming grace and dying love."

Oh, how richly you are fed! The flesh of God's own Son is the spiritual meat of every heir of heaven. Hungry souls, come to Jesus if you would be fed.

Jesus gives his people drink also. There are some tropical trees which, as soon as they are tapped, yield liquids as sweet and rich as milk, and many drink and are refreshed by them. Jesus Christ's heart blood is the wine of his people. The atonement which he has perfected by his sufferings is the golden cup out of which they drink, and drink again, till their mourning souls are made glad, and their fainting hearts are strengthened and refreshed. Jesus gives us the water of life, the wines on the lees well refined, the wine and milk, without money and without price. What a tree of life to yield us both meat and drink!

Jesus is a tree of life yielding clothing too. Adam went to the fig tree for his garments, and the fig leaves yielded him such covering as they could. But we come to Christ, and we find, not fig leaves, but a robe of righteousness that is matchless for its beauty, comely

in its proportions, one which will never wear out, which exactly suits to cover our nakedness from head to foot, and when we put it on makes us fair to look upon, even as Christ himself. O ye who would be rearayed till ye shall be fit to stand amongst the courtiers of the skies, come ye to Jesus, and find garments such as you need upon this tree of life!

This tree also yields medicine. "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Lay a plaster upon any wound, and if it be but the plaster of King Jesus, it will heal it. But one promise from his lips, but one leaf from this tree, but one word from his Spirit, but one drop of his blood, and this is heaven's court-plaster indeed. It is true that there was no balm in Gilead, there was no physician there; and, therefore, the hurt of the daughter of Israel's people was not healed. But there *is* balm in Jesus, there *is* a Physician at Calvary, and the hurt of the daughter of God's people shall be healed if she will but fly to Jesus Christ for healing.

And what shall I more say? Is there anything else your spirits can want? O children of God, Christ is all! O ye ungodly ones, who have been roaming through the wood to find the tree that should supply your wants, stop here. This "apple tree *among the trees of the wood" is the tree which your souls require. Stay here, and you shall have all that you need. For listen,—*this tree yields a shelter from the storm.* Other trees are dangerous when the tempest howls; but he that shelters beneath the tree of the Lord Jesus shall find that all the thunder-bolts of God shall fly by him, and do him no injury. He cannot be hurt who clings to Jesus. Heaven and earth should sooner pass away than a soul be lost that hides beneath the boughs of this tree. And oh, you who have hidden there to shelter from the wrath of God, let me remind you that in every other kind of danger it will also yield you shelter; and if you are not in danger, yet still in the hot days of care you shall find the shade of it to be cool and genial. The spouse in Solomon's Song said, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Get Christ, and you have got comfort, joy, peace, and liberty; and when the trouble comes, you shall find shelter and deliverance by coming near to him.

He is the tree of life, then, yielding twelve manner of fruits, those fruits being always ripe and always ready, for they ripen every month, all being free to all who desire them, for the leaves are not for the healing of some, but "for the healing of the nations." What a large word! Then there are enough of these leaves for the healing of all the nations that shall ever come into the world. Oh, may God grant that none of you may die from spiritual sickness when these leaves can heal you, and may none of you be filling yourselves with the sour grapes of this world, the poisonous grapes of sin, while the sweet fruits of Christ's love are waiting, which would refresh you and satisfy you.

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,120, "The Apple Tree in the Wood;" and No. 3,249, "Under the Apple Tree."

III. And now I have to show you how to get at the fruit of this tree of life.

That is the main matter. Little does it boot to tell that there is fruit, unless we can tell how it can be got at. I wish that all here really wanted to know the way, but I am afraid many care very little about it. Dr. Payson had once been out to tea with one of his people, who had been particularly hospitable to him, and when he was going, the doctor said, "Well, now, madam, you have treated me exceedingly well, but how do you treat my Master?" That is a question I should like to put to some of you. How do you treat my Master? Why, you treat him as if he were not Christ, as if you did not want him. But you do need him. May you find him soon, for when you come to die, you will want him then, and perhaps then you may not find him.

Well, *the way to get the fruit from this tree is by faith.* That is the hand that plucks the golden apples. Canst thou believe? That is the thing. Canst thou believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died upon the cross? "Yes," sayest thou, "I believe that." Canst thou believe that, in consequence of his sufferings, he is able to save? "Ay," sayest thou. Canst thou believe that he will save thee? Wilt thou trust him to save thee? If so, thou art saved. If thy soul comes to Jesus, and says, "My Lord, I believe in thee, that thou art able to save to the uttermost, and now I throw myself upon thee," that is faith.

When Mr. Andrew Fuller was going to preach before an Association, he rode to the meeting on his horse. There had been a good deal of rain, and the rivers were very much swollen. He got to one river which he had to cross. He looked at it, and he was half afraid of the strong current, as he did not know the depth. A farmer, who happened to be standing by, said, "It is all right, Mr. Fuller; you will get through it all right, sir; the horse will keep its feet." Mr. Fuller went in, and the water got up to the girth, and then up to the saddle, and he began to get uncomfortably wet. Mr. Fuller thought he had better turn round, and he was going to do so when the same farmer shouted, "Go on, Mr. Fuller; go on; I know it is all right;" and Mr. Fuller said, "Then I will go on; I will go by faith." Now, sinner, it is very like that with you. You think that your sins are so deep that Christ will never be able to carry you over them; but I say to you,—It is all right, sinner; trust Jesus, and he will carry you through hell itself, if that is needful. If you had all the sins of all the men that have ever lived, and they were all yours, if you could trust him, Jesus Christ would carry you through the current of all that sin. It is all right, man! Only trust Christ. The river may be deep, but Christ's love is deeper still. It is all right, man! Do not let the devil make you doubt my Lord and Master. He is a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies, but my Master is faithful and true. Rest on him, and all will be well. The waves may roll, the river may seem to be deeper than you thought it to be,—and rest assured it is much deeper than you know it to be;—

but the almighty arm of Jesus—that strong arm that can shake the heavens and the earth, and move the pillars thereof as Samson moved the pillars of Gaza's gates,—that strong arm can hold you up, and bear you safely through, if you do but cling to it, and rest on it. O soul, rest in Jesus, and you are saved!

Once again. *If at the first you do not seem to get the fruit from this tree, shake it by prayer.* "Oh!" say you, "I have been praying." Yes, but a tree does not always drop its fruit at the first shake you give it. Shake it again, man; give it another shake! And sometimes, when the tree is loaded, and is pretty firm in the earth, you have to shake it to and fro, and at last you plant your feet, and get a hold of it, and shake it with might and main, till you strain every muscle and sinew to get the fruit down. And that is the way to pray. Shake the tree of life until the mercy drops into your lap. Christ loves for men to beg hard of him. You cannot be too importunate. That which might be disagreeable to your fellow-creatures when you beg of them, will be agreeable to Christ. Oh, get ye to your chambers, get ye to your chambers, ye that have not found Christ; get to your bed-sides, to your little closets, and "seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." May the Spirit of God constrain you to pray. May he constrain you to continue in prayer. Jesus must hear you. The gate of heaven is open to the sturdy knocker that will not take a denial. The Lord enable you so to plead that, at the last, you will be able to say, "Thou hast heard my voice and my supplication; thou hast inclined thine ear unto me; therefore will I pray unto thee as long as I live."

May God add his blessing to these rambling thoughts, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

GENESIS II. 1—17; AND REVELATION XXII.

Genesis ii. Verses 1—8. *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.*

Everything was ready for man's use, every fruit-bearing tree for his nourishment, every creature to do his bidding, for it was the will of God that he should "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." God did not place the man