

“Where Do You Find Your Strength?” (the Cedar Tree)—  
Psalm 92:12-15

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Where Do You Find Your Strength?” (the Cedar Tree), is Psalm 92:12-15 → *The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures poetry abounds in the preaching of the prophets, the teachings of the wise and the songs and psalms of worship. You may not recognize it when you read the Old Testament because Hebrew poetry is not like the poetry with which we are accustomed. Common poetry in our culture usually follows the rule of rhyme (i.e. “Roses are red, violets are blue, I think your nose looks like a B-52”). Those who cherish serious poetry might not even consider this poetry. Hebrew poetry is more introspective and descriptive and doesn’t need to rhyme. Its pictures are intended to make you think with your senses as you consider your relationship with Yahweh.

The text before us is taken from the psalms which contain many poetic descriptions of God's dealings with His people and their living in relationship with Him. The psalms were used in the temple worship in Jerusalem and, later on, in the synagogues. The psalm of our text uses the picture of a tree we will consider this evening—the cedar tree.

In Biblical days Lebanon was known for its abundance of cedar trees. They have been known to grow up to a hundred and thirty feet tall with a trunk spanning eight feet wide. It was the biggest and strongest tree in the Middle East. The wood was highly esteemed for its durability and strength. Thus, it was used extensively by the Egyptians for building ships, used by King David for the building of his palace (cf. 2 Samuel 5:11ff.), used in the building of Solomon's temple (cf. 1 Kings 5:6-10) as well as the temple built after the Babylonian Exile (cf. Ezra 3:7). The cedar tree was used to describe the strength of nations such as the Assyrians (cf. Ezekiel 31:3) and the Amorites (cf. Amos 2:9) and even the kingdom of Judah (cf. Jeremiah 22:6).

Where do you find your strength? Strength, majesty and dignity "in the hands" of sinful human beings can be rather dangerous at times. As happened so often with God's people in the Old Testament Church, people seek physical and spiritual strength from sources outside of God's will. You may feel strong and secure with your possessions and money; your job or the positions you fill in organizations; your "allies" and

important acquaintances; even in your physical vitality, “smarts” and abilities. While such counterfeit gods may help you manipulate your way through this life, they will not be able to sustain the strength needed for you to stand before Yahweh on the Last Day.

So, where do you find your strength? In Jeremiah 17:5 the prophet says: *Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.”* Your strength can only be found in turning to Yahweh by repentance of your sin of idolatry and trusting in His righteousness alone. It is at this point that the mighty cedar tree in our text is used positively to picture your relationship with the LORD. Instead of humbling those who think they are like the mighty cedars by cutting them down, it describes living as a growing cedar in the presence of the LORD!

According to verse 12 of our text, to *flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon* has to do with being *righteous* in God’s sight. Being *righteous* before the LORD happens only on His terms and in His way. Yahweh had promised through the prophet Jeremiah that days were coming when He would *raise up for David a righteous Branch* Who would *reign as king and deal wisely, and . . . execute justice and righteousness in the land*. He (i.e. this *righteous Branch*) would even be called: *“The LORD is our righteousness.”* (cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6) It was the promise of Jesus, Whom 1 Corinthians 1:30 says became **to us** wisdom

from God, **righteousness** and sanctification and redemption.

Jesus had stated to John the Baptizer His reason for being baptized by John was *to fulfill **all** righteousness*. (cf. Matthew 3:15) By His active obedience, living in perfect obedience to God's Law **for you**, His obedience is yours by faith in Him. That active obedience led Him into His passive obedience, where He willingly allowed Himself to be arrested, beaten, mocked and killed on the cross **for you**. He was the righteous sacrifice so that you can be forgiven of all your sins for all time! You stand righteous and blameless before the LORD by faith in Jesus. It is in His righteousness alone that you *flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon*.

You grow in this relationship with the LORD as you *are planted in the house of the LORD and flourish in the courts of our God*. It is a picture of being nurtured for growth by your presence in the LORD's presence at His temple. That temple in Jerusalem was a type of Jesus, in Whom you now experience the presence of God. You grow and *flourish* in your faith as you come to His *house* here to dispense and receive His forgiveness through His real presence in the Lord's Supper, in His Word and in the midst of the gathered believers. His promise from Matthew 18:21 rings true: *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*.

The purpose of the picture of growth throughout the teachings of

Scripture is to *bear fruit*. Describing our relationship with God through faith in Jesus using the picture of a vine and its branches, He told His disciples in John 15:16 that He choose them so that they *should go and bear fruit* which would *abide*. This fruit is the good works which flow from a relationship with God in the righteousness of Christ. After all, Ephesians 2:10 says that you are *His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them*.

The abiding nature of these good works is described in verse 14 of our text: *They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green*. Good works continue throughout your life as you live with perseverance, remaining faithful to Christ into eternity. Even repentance is included in the abiding nature of this fruit for, when you are unfaithful in sin, Jesus holds out to you the promise of forgiveness: *whoever comes to Me I will never cast out*. (cf. John 6:37) Confession (i.e. repentance), absolution (i.e. forgiveness) and fruit bearing (i.e. good works) are like being a strong cedar *ever full of sap and green*.

Such continued growth in holy deeds flow in love and witnessing to others with the desire for others to hear you proclaim and see you live the atoning work of Jesus. Verse 15 of our text says the purpose of your *fruit is to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him*. This declaration is vitally important amidst so

many who are claiming that Yahweh is unrighteous and not *upright*. It happens every time disaster strikes the faithless and they blame Him for allowing such bad stuff to happen to them. It happens every time satan gets a foothold in an effort to discredit the accuracy of the Bible through academia, scholarly studies and other wisdom and knowledge without *the fear of the LORD* (cf. Proverbs 9:10). Simply put, God becomes the unrighteous, cosmic “meany” when things don’t go their way.

In contrast, the Christian is like a cedar tree, strong in the midst of everything which assails it, even in what appear to be the weakest, bleakest times. It’s a strength and character which says to others that *Yahweh is my rock* (i.e. another picture of the source of our strength in the Scriptures). Thus, you continue to confess that your strength is in Him alone in Whom *there is no unrighteousness*. Rather, He is the source of righteousness in all its forms in the Person & Work of Jesus! You find your strength as you grow in *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,  
so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him  
and established in the faith, just as you were taught,  
abounding in thanksgiving.*

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