

Sermon Notes
July 16th, 2017
The Tree and the Chaff

Introduction: Introduce yourself.

Richard Nelson sent this to me on Monday after last week's message on verses 1-2 of Psalm 1, which I called a wisdom psalm. It's a wise saying he wrote about 30 years ago. It says: "It takes 60 seconds to make an hour—yet one smile can make your day." Beautifully put, Richard. Now turn to your neighbour and say to them: "Go ahead smile, make my day"!

Psalm 1 is wisdom for eternal living. But wisdom is in short supply. Yet we swim in a sea of information and knowledge.

Buckminster Fuller created the "Knowledge Doubling Curve"; he noticed that **until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today things are not as simple as different types of knowledge have different rates of growth.** For example, nanotechnology knowledge is doubling every two years and clinical knowledge every 18 months. But on average human knowledge is doubling every 13 months. According to IBM, the build out of the "internet of things" will lead to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours. Apparently Google and Safari are barely scratching the surface of indexing the knowledge we already have. 4 1 thousandth of it only. Just 200 terabytes' worth. While 500 million terabytes of knowledge is flowing out there. To map the human brain is going to take billions of Petabytes.

But wisdom is in short supply in our world. Who would say that human wisdom is doubling? Who would predict that in 13 months' time or in the next 12 hours you'll become twice as wise as you are now because you know more? Growing in wisdom as Jesus did—and he grew in wisdom and in favour with God and man—as we must, doesn't work that way. Wisdom is the result of years of reflection, living well and right, humility, revelation from God, obedience to God's teachings, much time alone and in community, and self-control. We are still trying to get hold of the wisdom of thousands of years ago. And we haven't caught up yet! It's evident that God has gifted humanity with wisdom. He reveals what he knows so we can live the life he intends. Don't eat of that tree for in the day you eat of it you will die. That's wisdom humanity still refuses to get.

To our main text: Read Psalm 1... Happy the Person. He doesn't do life with those who oppose God and his ways. Instead he lives by eating the book, by nourishing his soul on the word of God. This week I managed to copy by hand Psalms 1-2. How about you?

Now in verse 3 we are given the results of this meditation, this immersion in the word of God. I am calling this wisdom living. Wisdom for life often comes from doing another activity. It comes not so much in a direct way to us but in an indirect way. More on that later. This is life with God. God is calling us as his people and our nation through us. In proverbs 8 God says: **To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. O simple ones, learn prudence' acquire intelligence, you who lack it. Let's do it.**

Verse 3: He is like a tree well rooted by streams of water, plenty of fruit, plenty of lush leaves, plenty of success.

Using the tree as an image to talk about good and bad people is common throughout the Bible and the lands of the Bible. If you were a tree, what kind of a tree would you be? Perhaps ask your loved one today to describe you as a kind of tree. I see these things on FB occasionally. Me, I'd want to be a fig tree. My favorite fruit. Wally and his Boss Hogs friends would probably want to be a barbecue tree if there were one.

The tree of Psalm 1:3 is a special tree, **a unique tree**. It gets life and it gives life. It is full of life. It produces after its kind (like Genesis says). It's a picture of abundance. The happy one who attaches himself to the word of God is full of wisdom and he gives his life abundantly to others. The happy person who dwells on the word of God nourishes and enriches the church and others. He lives for others. A tree is an image of a life that has plenty to give to others.

Over 250 times in the Bible the word tree is mentioned in very important passages. It's worth reflecting on how it is most often used.

- The Amorites, for ex., who were in the promised land before Israel are described as cedars, and strong oaks. They took pride in themselves, in their violence, in their idolatry. God did away with them because of their evil ways.
- Psalm 52:16 describes king David as a thriving olive tree in God's house. The righteous flourish like date palms.
- The Song in Psalm 92:12 describes the people of God as growing tall like a cedar of Lebanon deep-rooted in the house of the Lord, flowering in the courts of our God. They yield fruit even in old age. They are lush and fresh.
- In Ezekiel 6:13 Israel made idols and worshipped them under every spreading tree and every oak. 1 Kings 14:23 calls this the abominations of Israel.
Not only in the Bible but in the writings of neighboring nations as well, the tree looms large.
- In 1300 B.C. Egyptian writers compare a hotheaded man to a tree that grows outdoors, which suddenly loses its foliage. But the man who is truly self-controlled is like a tree grown in a garden. It flourished. It yields double the harvest, its fruit is sweet and its shade is pleasant.
- King Shulgi of Ur in 2100 B.C. is described as a date palm planted by the water ditch and a cedar rooted by abundant water of pleasant shade.
- In Phoenicia, a sarcophagus, a tomb or a burial place, king Eshmunazar in 500 B.C. curses anyone who will disturb his burial with these words: "let them have no roots below, and no fruit above", the same kind of language that Ezekiel and Job use (Ezekiel 37:32, Job 18:16).
- In Genesis 1-2 the tree is mentioned 8 times producing after its kind, the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- **And the piece de resistance: God himself is pictured as a green pine tree, as the source of our fruit, our abundance, our supply and our refuge. Hosea 14:8 read.**

You get the idea, I'm sure, that the tree is an image used as a symbol of pride and idolatry as well as wise living, blessing and abundance. **Of God himself.** This is true everywhere in the Middle East.

➤ **A deeply rooted tree.** The translation planted really means deeply rooted. It's not just placed in any dirt. The planter takes his time, finds the right place, digs the right size hole, pays attention to how deep he needs to go. Too shallow, he would risk a scrawny tree. The right depth would give it access to the right nutrients it needs. There is planning, there is wisdom where to plant and how to plant this tree. Planted in the wrong kind of dirt it would not flourish, it would not last. Because it is deeply planted even when the world's strongest winds blow against it, like the house built on the rock Jesus told us about they will not dislodge it. Some trees in our world have stood the ravages of the weather for hundreds and thousands of years. The Cedar groves of Lebanon flourish at heights of 10,000 feet or more. They take roots on the mountain sides. They get their moisture from the snowcapped mountains of Lebanon. They have long productive years. They reach heights of 130 feet with 46 feet diameter trunks. They live to 3000 years and more. If those trees could only talk like they do in the Lord of the Ring!

➤ **By streams,** or canals or channels of water that run year-round underground, to feed it. It's invisible water but the fruit on the tree tells the story. Drought conditions are common in the Middle East. Most of the land is arid. Much desert. Rain, aside from a couple of months a year, is rare. Psalm 104:16-17 says "the trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, they provide blessings and protection. Without this deep roots near water they would not thrive."

This tree is protected from rain shortage and drought conditions. How? There is a spring or a gushing fountain which empties into a small pool, and from this pool, water gently flows into canals that water the tree. That's the image the word streams paints for us.

➤ **A fruit tree of another kind.** This tree is a fruit tree but unique in kind. I have fruit trees in my yard, cherries, apples, peaches, pears. Every one of them bears fruit in the summer but stops bearing come winter. In fact, the leaves drop. But this tree has fruit all the time and has foliage all the time. It is always sheltering, always productive. This is no ordinary tree. It is not mindful of what season it is. It is programmed by God to yield fruit in all seasons just like the tree of life in Revelation 22:1-2. The tree of life that nourishes and brings healing to the nations.

➤ **A leafy tree.** Notice something peculiar about the foliage of this tree. It's a fruit tree and not a deciduous tree like a pine tree that keeps its needles year-round, which is natural. It has leaves all year round. But notice the order. First the fruit then the leaves. The order is reversed. Fruit before leaves. That's unusual for fruit trees. This tree has fruit, then leaves that never drop. When it's winter outside this tree is spring and summer inside. Why the reversal? To show the value of both fruit and foliage in this tree. Wise poets can take these liberties to make their point. The fruit is healing and the leaves also have healing properties and usefulness as Ezekiel and Jeremiah make clear.

Ezekiel says in 47:12: “On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them **flows from the sanctuary**. Their fruit will be for food, **and their leaves for healing!**” **Ah this tree is planted in worship, its waters come from where God abides, in the dwelling place of God. Any wonder that the whole tree, all of it is useful and helpful and a source of blessing?**

Jeremiah 17:7-8 Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and **its leaves shall stay green**; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

➤ **In all they do, they prosper.** In their doing of whatever work they do, there is prosperity, there is success. The success is in the doing and not necessarily in what is produced. The Lord tells Joshua in 1:8 after Moses his mentor was gone: “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate (chew and immerse or marinate yourself in it) on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.

How do you like that? How would you like it if all that you do turns out right and good and helpful? The same words God gives us here he also gave to Joseph in Genesis 39:2-3, “The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master (a pagan) saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands.” Whatever Joseph did it thrived. The quality of his life was excellent. What he produced reflected that.

God didn’t rubber stamp Abraham’s or Moses’, or Joshua’s, or Joseph’s, or David’s lives because they produced for God but because what they did they did it wholeheartedly. That’s the work God blesses. The results are his. Wisely anchor your life in God’s word, and doing right, undertake what God has put before you and you will enjoy good success. God says in Zechariah 3:10 that the Christian dream is that everyone of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree. This is something like the American dream: House for whoever wants it, a car in every garage, a chicken in every pot, a computer in every home.

Will wait for the chaff for next week.

I would like to draw just 3 implications of what I said about the tree today.

First, earlier I spoke about how the tree flourishing is a result of the water it is near. It lives near the water of life. Its leaves are nourished by the sun. The fruit grows as a result of this proximity. The tree did not grow the fruit all by itself. The rain, the fountains underneath, the sunshine did. Fruit came from these things. The tree is not about achievements.

There are many things in the Christian life that we cannot strive to accomplish in a direct way. This psalmist understood that if he is going to be a steady, helpful, like God in his love and generosity he must use the means necessary to get him there. In this case the eating the word of God. Being close to water. Being deep in the soil of the goodness of God. He

meditates on the teachings of God day and night and he becomes the kind of tree he became.

Do you ever wonder if you'll ever come to love your enemies and those who hate and persecute you and want to do you harm? When will my anxiety leave? How will I ever be the kind of person who forgives before he stewes for months in the wrongs committed against him? Do you ever wonder if the day you will become like Christ in your life will ever come? We were created to be conformed to the image of Christ. In our love for the world and for our enemies and neighbors and for ourselves we train ourselves to love not so much by loving but by means of other graces like serving others, praying for our enemies, staying close to God and his wisdom.

Have you also despaired of living without pride and becoming humble of heart? What happened? How often have you failed and still fail? Then we say to ourselves I must try harder the next time. The next time comes and what happens, the same thing. Why? It's because by will alone we cannot do it. Trying harder alone has never worked for me. But if we train ourselves for the purpose of godliness by meditating and deepening our roots in the word, we become loving, joyful, peaceful, humble and kind.

Second: There is a tree between Genesis and Revelation. It's the tree that towers over all trees. It is the tree on which the Prince of Glory died. The tree that gives us life eternal. The tree upon which he became cursed for us. Cursed everyone who hangs on a tree. That tree upon which he died is a source of blessings and goodness for the nations and a source of curse for those who reject. The tree that divides history, that spans all history, is a cross. It was a dead tree. There was no life in that tree. It had been cut down. **But life was on it.**

On that tree the kingdom of God was established for good. On that tree, and under that tree, and because of that tree a revolution began. The world reached its zenith on that tree. The tree on which God became one of us in our suffering. That tree is the beam that bridges humanity with God. That tree gives life to all who want it. That tree, is also the tree upon which we also come to die with him. When God bids a man come to him he bids him to come and die with him, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said. He was martyred just days in a German camp before the liberation. Jesus died for us and we died to ourselves and our sinfulness with him. That tree stands as the biggest monument in history to the love of God of humanity. There is more.

Third and last. God is pictured as a green pine tree, as our fruitfulness, our abundance, our refuge. And we are pictured as a tree with fruit and leaves that refresh and heal. We are imitators of God when we do. We are called throughout the Bible to be imitators of God. Paul says in Ephesians 5:1-2 "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Yes imitators of God. Is that even possible? Is that human? Yes it is the destiny of humanity. Jesus says in Luke 6:40 A disciple is not above his teacher but when he is trained he will be like his teacher. He will be like him, an imitator of him, a replica of him. Here is wisdom. Let him who has ear hear the challenges of being like the tree of Psalm 1:3, of coming to the tree on which the savior of the world died, of dying with him, and of imitating God in Christ.

We are going to enter into a few moments of silence to give you a chance to take some of what was said in. Is there something that touched your heart? Perhaps you want to pray it through today and this week. Rest in the presence of God who makes you that kind of a tree. After some moments, Tom will come and pronounce our benediction, then we leave.