

THE RIGHTEOUS COMPARED TO CEDARS

(Discourse by J. A. Bohnet, 1913 Convention Report, starting page 208.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord: The subject of my talk today is found in Psalms 92, that latter part of V. 12:—*they*—“*the righteous...shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*” On a former occasion, some years ago at the Norfolk Convention I discoursed on the first part of the verse, “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree.” Some of you may have been there and heard me, or you may have read my talk in “the Convention Report” covering that event. As doubtless many are present who have not had that privilege, and in order to show the depth of meaning in the entire verse I will prelimate my remarks with a very brief recital of the thoughts I presented at that time.

There is a wealth and depth of meaning in every line of the Bible could we but fathom the divine intention. Some have questioned, Why is not the Scripture given in simple language so all might readily understand? We might well reply, For the same reason that gold is not found on the top of the ground where every one could easily pick it up. The Lord wants man to *dig* for spiritual as well as earthly treasure.

Treating now the text, “THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL FLOURISH LIKE THE PALM TREE”—why does the Lord in this connection liken the righteous to the palm tree? What is there about a palm tree that conforms to the character of a saint? In what respect does the palm tree flourish? Why did not Jehovah God, liken a saint to some other tree? Why does he select the palm tree?

At the Norfolk assembly I went into this subject at considerable length. Today I can give only a brief resume of that lengthy talk, my discourse being especially on the *latter* half of the text—a consideration of the trees of Lebanon. On the occasion to which I have referred, I showed that the palm tree is distinctive from all other trees of the forestry—a peculiar tree. I speak of the date palm, of course, a fruit-bearing proposition, not the common palmetto tree which is so often mistaken for a palm.

THE PALM IS A PECULIAR TREE. It somewhat resembles a telegraph pole, with a little tuft of green at the top. There is nothing about a palm tree to invite respect or admiration. Just so it is with respect to the saint, the righteous. The Lord denominates these as a “peculiar people”—1 Pet. 2:9, and there is about them nothing that would command the respect or admiration of the average individual or passer-by. Indeed, we are a peculiar people, not even condescending to take up a collection in connection with our sermons. We are distinctive from all others of mankind.

THE PALM TREE GROWS STRAIGHT. It grows *straight heavenward*. This illustrates the intention of the saints, the righteous ones. Their course, like that of the palm tree, is

heavenward and straight. No aside branchings. God says, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." Notice the similitude.

Not only does the palm tree grow straight heavenward, but it OVERTOPS ALL THE OTHER TREES. In its majestic simplicity it rises far above the common kind. This is true of the righteous. In regal simplicity of heart they are exalted above their fellows in the Heavenly Father's sight. They flourish like the palm tree. Now we begin to see why the Lord used that expression. The palm tree possesses characteristics befitting the character of a saint. Of all the forestry elements THE PALM TREE CASTS THE LEAST SHADOW. It does not interfere with the growth of its neighbor by hindering the rain and sunshine. So likewise the Lord's people—the righteous—do not retard the growth and prosperity of other fellow-beings by preventing the rain of truth and the glorious sunlight of God from falling upon them. They do all they can to assist others who are entitled to a share of life's blessings.

Again, THE PALM TREE IS SOFTEST AT THE HEART, whereas other trees are hardest at the heart. This betokens the heart attitude of the righteous. In loving sympathy the saint endeavors to fulfill the law of God, cultivating the fruits and graces of the spirit day by day. More and more we see why the Lord used the palm tree to exemplify the character of the righteous. Oh, the depth of wisdom in the inspired Word! Could we but fathom its mighty depths! It is a wonderful Book to those whose spiritual eyes have been enlightened sufficiently to grasp the length and breadth and the heights and depths of God's gracious plan for the salvation and redemption of mankind.

It has been my privilege to study quite extensively into the nature of the palm tree both in Mexico and California. The text under consideration was given me many years ago for a Bible class topic, and as I knew comparatively nothing concerning the peculiar characteristics of this species of the woods, I then and there resolved to make a special study of this tree that on another occasion I might do justice to the subject if called upon. The result of my investigation I am now endeavoring to present to you as briefly as I can.

Of all the trees extant THE PALM TREE HAS THE FEWEST ROOTS, has the *least hold upon earth*. It has a main taproot, like a carrot, extending straight down into the earth with minute rootlets just sufficient to maintain its upright position. All the nourishment it derives from mother earth is used in its upward building and not in securing an earthly hold. And so it is with the righteous. They are in the world, but not of the world. All the vitality derived out of the world is employed for their uplift and spiritual welfare. They are not concerned in the securing of earthly rights and privileges. They, too, have the last possible hold upon the earth and its affairs. The rather are they seeking to lay up treasures in heaven. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." How true.

The palm tree has another characteristic: IT WILL NOT BE REPRESSED. Put a heavy stone slab over the spot where a palm tree starts to grow and note the result. It will lift that stone or grow around it and continue its course heavenward. In California near the Mariposa trail a settler in early days built himself a little cabin directly on the spot where a palm tree was growing. Did that cabin hinder the palm tree? Not much. The palm tree came up through the floor of that cabin. It penetrated the ceiling and grew out through the roof. There stands the cabin, and there is the palm. The righteous are not easily repressed or swerved from their heavenward course. They refuse to be hindered by the difficulties and besetments of life. If impossible for them to remove an obstacle from their pathway, they will pass on around it, go over it, or, if necessary, *through* it, any way to get to where they are determined to be.

Let me ask again—why did not the Lord use the stately oak tree in its majestic strength and stateliness, its vigor and beauty to exemplify the character of the righteous? Why not the common forest trees? Dear friends, they are not *evergreen*. Six months of the year these trees have the appearance of deadness. There is no growth, no prosperity. Would the Lord want his people apparently inert half the time of their existence on earth? Surely no. He wants them like the palm tree; evergreen; ever showing signs of life; ever prosperous in the things pertaining to Almighty God and their own spiritual aggrandizement.

We note further: THE OLDER THE PALM TREE, THE MORE ABUNDANT, LUSCIOUS AND SWEETER IS ITS FRUIT. Besides, *it bears early and late*—has an extended fruit season—does not bear fruit for itself; holds forth its fruitage in clusters, so that one can help himself to much or little as may be desired. How appropriate all this is to the righteous characteristic. The longer the Christian is in the way of the Lord, the sweeter and more abundant his fruitage—the fruits of the spirit—love, joy, peace, brotherly kindness and all those kindred virtues enumerated by the Apostle Paul. Come to the Christian early or late, in season or out of season, and secure this fruitage in large or small measure, as may be desired. We have not this fruitage for self, but for others in need. Here again we note the appropriateness of the text to the righteous characteristics. They (the righteous) “shall flourish like the palm tree.”

Another peculiarity of the palm tree: THE DUST OF THE DESERT (which adheres to trees ordinarily) DOES NOT ACCUMULATE ON THE PALM TREE. This may well be likened to the righteous one keeping himself pure and unspotted; free from all earthly influences; free from contamination; free from the doctrinal dust that is blown about by the winds—as wind in scriptural symbolism denotes doctrine.

Yet another point. There is in the palm tree locality in Palestine a poisonous vine known as the “tree killer” and which derives its name from the fact that it kills every tree with which it comes in contact by enshrouding the tree so thoroughly as to shut out all sunlight

and by absorbing the moisture from the ground. The tree dies and the poison vine stands there in the form of the tree which gave it shape. No tree is known that will successfully resist the action of this tree killer save one alone. *It is the palm.* It matters not how many of the tree-killing vines may grow about and upon the palm tree. It survives; it remains alive. So with the righteous. Many and severe may be the troubles, besetments and poisonous influences of this life, many and heavy the burdens which tend to destroy others—the saints of the most high prosper, survive, notwithstanding. They live right on and continue their heavenward course. Though bowed down beneath a load of care, the righteous ones flourish. It is written: “*The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree.*”

Dear friends, I might go on citing you numerous other instances of similitude in the characteristics of the palm tree and the people of God, but my topic for this occasion is the latter part of the verse I have read in your hearing—“THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL GROW AS THE CEDARS OF LEBANON.” We have the 92nd Psalm as it pertains to the palm tree. So now we proceed to portray the still more wonderful application of the latter half of the verse to the growth and development of the righteous. Perhaps I have consumed too much of my allotted time in an examination of the first part of the peculiar scripture verse. I, therefore, still must be brief in my delineation of the other half of the verse.

THE CEDARS OF LEBANON GROW ON THE MOUNTAIN. They are found nowhere except upon the Syrian range of mountains 6,500 to 8,000 feet above the level of the Mediterranean Sea. They are not found on the lowlands. How suitably this applies to the righteous of the Lord. The prophet Nahum declares: “Behold upon the mountains the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace” (Nahum 1:15). The inspired writer here refers to our Lord Jesus and His body members, the church. The head of this great institution was born 1,900 years ago, and we, the last members of that body—the feet—are in process of being born now. Zechariah tells us, in chapter 14 and verse 4: “His [Christ’s] feet shall stand upon the mount.” We have an exalted position.

As Jesus was lifted up, so likewise must we be raised to a high state, a position of exaltation according as the Lord has promised. From this elevated plane we command an unobstructed view of our surroundings in all directions. We see from this high station north, east, south and west, so to speak, and take in every detail of the Creator’s gracious plan of redemption from sorrow, sin and death. None on the lower plane of life is able to see these things. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit [the high things], neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned” (from a lofty position such as only the saints occupies). Syria signifies the High Land. Lebanon means white mountain. White means pure. Mountain means kingdom. Here we have the solution. We are promised participation in the Kingdom of God. And here we note also the fit application of the department of the church membership to the cedars of Lebanon.

Lebanon wood is RED, FRAGRANT AND DURABLE. The color red is a fit signification of the blood of Christ, as we sometimes sing, “washed in the blood of the Lamb.” We are said to be a sweet odor in the nostrils of Jehovah. And we are admonished by him to endure patiently unto the end of life; then shall we reign with the Lord in the blessing of all mankind. To do this we must endure hardness as good soldiers of the cross of Christ. Is it not wonderful to think of the depth of meaning embodied in the text, “The righteous do flourish like the palm tree, and they grow as the cedars of Lebanon”?

The Lebanon trees are STOUT OF TRUNK and make *excellent building material*. Solomon’s temple was furnished with this timber. That magnificent edifice standing on the present site of the Mosque of Omar just within the walls of the City of Jerusalem and which was constructed without the sound of a hammer and contained the ark of the covenant, the bowl of heavenly manna, Aaron’s rod that budded and other sacred emblems of the Jewish tabernacle in the wilderness was equipped with the most sacred and costly things of God. The saints of God are staunch—stout hearted—they are able to resist the fierce doctrinal winds which uproot those not well established in the truth of God’s Word, even as the Lebanon trees in their stoutness are not bent from their upright position by the winds that sweep fiercely over the mountain crest in times of tempest and storm.

Why is Lebanon wood so very costly? The answer lies in the fact of *scarcity of this kind of timber* and the extreme difficulty in securing it. The costliest of everything was used in connection with Solomon’s temple. Our Lord assures us that we are the temple of the Lord. Each of us is a stone in that greatest of all temples, and which, like Solomon’s temple, is constructed without the sound of a hammer, “fitted and jointed together, an holy temple not made with hands.” In the Lord’s estimation of true value, we have the timber quality requisite for this glorious temple. He wants only the very best, the costliest, purchased at the price of the life of his only begotten son. Whereas once there were many thousands of these Lebanon trees on the Syrian range, now *only a very few remain*. Most of them have gone for special usage. So it is with the righteous ones. Only a few now remain. Soon these, too will be gone.

Dear friends, did any of you suppose this verse of Scripture so full of meaning? Here is food for thought. Like the palm tree, the LEBANON CEDARS ARE ALWAYS GREEN; always showing life and vitality in fact and in appearance. The wood of Lebanon admits of *magnificent polish*. In order to secure a polish there must be friction. We are polished by coming into friction contact with one another, and it is written that a man’s foes shall be those of his own household. By this friction process we are polished. The polished diamond has no light within itself. It merely reflects the light which it receives from the source of all light—the sun. Have we any light within our own self? No, we have not. We merely reflect the light we receive from the source of all light—the Sun of

Righteousness—our Lord. “When he who is our light shall appear, then shall we appear with him in glory.”

I have frequently been asked the question, “Why does not my neighbor come into the light of present truth? He is a noble man, big hearted and kind, but I cannot interest him in things pertaining to the kingdom?” My reply has been, Because all there is to your good neighbor is right on the surface, nothing beneath. Let me illustrate. Suppose you ask your boy to make you an elegant parlor table, a first-class article. He agrees and away he goes to the shed or shop and there selects a nicely planed pine board. Try as he may, he fails to get a polish on it, whereas the expert cabinet maker utterly ignores the nice smooth pine board when he starts to make such a table as will prove acceptable. He selects that knotty, knurly, cross-grained, ugly piece of board for this job. (That is how you and I came to be chosen of the Lord, who is an expert, in order to grace the habitation of the King.) We were not of the smooth pine board standard. We were of the ugly type, the type possessing the timber quality which admits of a desirable polish. But I am digressing from my topic. I feel assured of your pardon. I might well add, however, that Lebanon wood has a most beautiful grain. It is highly prized on this account.

The cedars of Lebanon ENTWINE THEIR BRANCHES. Cut down one of two trees that for years have grown side by side. The remaining tree is a sorry-looking spectacle, with its branches all on one side—a lopsided tree. But not so the Lebanon variety; the limbs of one grow right into the foliage of the neighbor tree. They have an affinity for each other. So likewise God’s dear saints. You find them in loving entwinement. Notice especially the sisters with arms about each other, notwithstanding they may have acquaintance of only a few days or hours. There is manifestly no shrinking away from one another, but a decided drawing together.

The Lebanon trees AFFORD GOOD SHELTER from wind and storm. This might fitly illustrate the kindly consideration on the part of the people of the Lord towards the wayfaring man—the stranger, if nothing further than the tendering of a cup of water to someone in need.

There is another peculiarity of the cedars of Lebanon to which I wish to call attention. Not only do they grow high up on the mountain on what is called the snow line in the atmosphere of purity, but *they grow in clusters*, in groves or bunches. Occasionally there is found an isolated one, but not often. So we find the righteous in clusters. Here in Madison a class, a cluster, of twenty or thirty members. At Chicago a cluster of about 400. At Zion City about thirty, I believe. In Pittsburgh upwards of 400. A still larger one in New York City. Occasionally I find an isolated one who is quite apt to inform me that his or her property is for sale with a view to removal into a cluster for sweet fellowship. You always find them in the atmosphere of purity—on the snow line, so to speak, and always on the mountain top. They indeed grow like the cedars of Lebanon.

Another thought: by reason of this position high up on the mountains these trees very naturally ENCOUNTER WORSE WINDS than do the trees that grow upon the lowlands. Yet are they not uprooted. And why not? Ah, dear friends, their roots penetrate deep into the rocks. Otherwise they would be torn from their position and hurled to the earth, or, perchance, sent thundering down the mountainside into the depths of the valley below. So it is with the righteous; they are securely anchored to the solid rock Christ Jesus. They cannot be moved by any of the fierce doctrinal winds. They are sure and steadfast, ever abounding in the work of the Lord; established on the sure foundation, they are enabled to resist successfully every evil tendency and remain where they are. If these should lose their hold on the eternal rock, they would be thrown to earth (which represents society), or, perchance be hurled down the mountain side into the dark valley, the second death.

The Lebanon cedar wood has an AROMATIC ODOR which is OFFENSIVE TO INSECTS. They will not go near it. An insect is a destroyer. There is something about the saint that is decidedly offensive to the element we might denominate a pest, a destroyer. The undesirable class of mankind zealously avoid contact or association with a saintly man of God. They separate themselves from us, do they not?

The *slow growth* of the Lebanon cedar *and its longevity* very aptly illustrate the steady growth in grace day by day and our growth in knowledge and strength. It bespeaks our immortality assurance if so be we pay our vow of loyalty to God.

From the locality of these cedars of Lebanon flows the Kedesha River, which empties into the Mediterranean Sea, at Port Tripoli. *Kedesha means holy*—the holy river is here exemplified. We read of it in the Book of Revelation, chapter two, v. 1. We understand this symbolic river is formed by 144,000 springs of living water—the entire delegation of the Lord's saints referred to in Revelation 14. Soon all these springs shall have merged in to a stream flowing from the throne of God, from the Kingdom, the mountain of the Lord, as a holy river of life. This is the picture set forth in the Kedesha (holy) River in its commencement where abide the cedars of Lebanon, high on the mountain (Kingdom realm) and its journey to the sea. John the Revelator was told that the waters he saw meant people, nations. So as the Kadesha moves onward to nourish the sea, so also the holy river of life moves on to supply eventually all people of every nation and clime. Wonderful is the Bible to all who study its precepts. One would scarcely believe there is so much in the verse I have been considering for our mutual benefit today.

Now I will present to you another text. It is found in Psalm 37:35. Here the Lord tells us about seeing *the wicked spreading himself like a green bay tree*. I have very carefully studied this tree, which grows all along the Pacific Coast. Its make-up delineates strikingly the character of the wicked. How different this tree from either the palm or

Lebanon cedar.

To the casual observer the green bay tree is *attractive*. While not a high-growing tree like the palm, its foliage is dense, and one might well desire the tree as an ornament in the front yard. What a protection from sun and rain. Neither could penetrate its leafy boughs. It appears well at a distance. But suspend judgment until you have reached its trunk. Cast now your eyes upward and note its straggled branches, knotty and twisted.

The wicked appear well to one at a distance, but, upon close acquaintance, there is disappointment. It is not a tree to be looked up to but rather one to be looked down upon, more of a demeaning character. Its dense foliage preventing the sunlight and rain from penetration, *casts a deep shadow*, which utterly hinders the growth of other trees or shrubs beneath it. As it destroys other trees which should have sun and rain, so the wicked hinder the sunlight of God's holy Word and the rain of truth from prospering those who have a right to these blessings.

Unlike the soft-hearted palm tree, the green bay tree *is hardest at the heart*. It bears no fruit, but instead it has a seed for perpetuating its kind. This seed is deceptive in that it closely resembles fruit. What may appear as fruitage on the part of the wicked is mere deception.

The roots (of the green bay tree, in contradistinction to those of the palm tree) *are many* and run out from the trunk in all directions, the very embodiment of selfishness and of a grasping disposition. This illustrates the characteristic of those who are called wicked. They seek for earthly possessions instead of lofty attainment.

During the San Francisco conflagration, a green bay tree in the midst of the burned section was burned to a charred trunk, yet it put forth sprouts and leaves. As it is *difficult of destruction*, so it is difficult to stamp out selfishness on the part of the wicked. *The leaves* of the tree *have a most disagreeable odor* which produces an intense headache almost instantly when crushed and smelled. Refrain from rubbing against a wicked person, lest you be sorry for so doing.

I deeply regret the presentation of these points so briefly when, by a more elaborate and detailed presentation, my talk would be far more interesting and effective. I am limited by the management to just an hour, when I should have at least three hours in which to portray the peculiarities of these three trees. My time is up now. Let us emulate the palm tree in our pursuit of the high attainment. Let us grow like the cedars of Lebanon. And let us not cast away our confidence that the Bible is truly the inspired Word of our Heavenly Father. In it we find consolation and a wealth of meaning to satisfy our every longing. The blessing of God be with you all. Amen.