

I See Men As Trees Walking

By Nathan Warner

“[S]ome people brought to [Jesus] a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’ And he looked up and said, ‘I see people, but they look like trees, walking’” (Mark 8:22-24).

What a beautiful vision this blind man was given of our spiritual nature. He saw in those brief moments between his blindness and his earthly sight, a clear spiritual picture of the people standing around him. Scripture is full of this blind man’s vision.

If our spiritual nature can be described as tree-like, then perhaps other aspects of spiritual horticulture apply. For example, does our spiritual condition spring from seeds? Is there more than one kind of seed it can spring from? Do we have roots? Is fruit produced? Are there different types of fruit that sprout from different seed? The answer from scripture to all of these questions is a resounding yes.

Let’s begin with the Parable of the Sower. *“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold” (Luke 8:5-8).*

People are compared to soil in this scripture, who either accept or don’t accept the seed that the sower sows. If they accept the seed, it grows in them and produces fruit. If the spiritual soil is poor it might briefly take root, but cannot be sustained and dies. And if people don’t accept the seed, it does not take root. What is this seed that Jesus refers to? He tells us plainly after the parable that *“[t]he seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).*

As Bereans, we take a special interest in the Word of God, especially since that Word, quite literally, is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So if the seed is the Word of God, what does the symbolism of the parable mean? Why didn’t the Word of God sprout to mature crops everywhere it fell?

Jesus explains that *“[t]he ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience” (Luke 8:12-15).*

One thing to see here is how critically important the root is to the seed. Without the root, the seed can do nothing – it would remain a seed and nothing more. Paul says it best in Romans: *“[R]emember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you” (Romans 11:18).* Here Paul is reiterating that we do not produce God’s fruit, but God in us produces His fruit. It is His seed, His root, and His fruit.

Jesus is the Root of the seed, which is the Word of God. He nourishes us so that God’s seed will spring up into spiritual health and maturity.

“[I]f the root is holy, so are the branches” (Romans 11:16). The root of the Word of God is Holy, because it is Jesus: *“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16).*

But what about all the sin in the world? Where does that spring from? Is there only one seed? Is the Word of God the only thing being planted in the hearts of men and women? According to the Parable of the Tares, there is other seed being planted and it is not from God: *“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age” (Matthew 13:37-40).*

We see that there is Good Seed and Bad Seed being sown in the world. So how do we recognize these seeds growing up in us and those around us? Jesus clarified in Matthew when He warned about false prophets: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-20).* While the seed is hidden in the growing tree, the fruit tells what kind of tree it is.

The Fruit of the Word of God, the Spirit of Truth, is nourishing, healing, and strengthening: *“[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).* When we see this fruit being produced, we know that God's seed is growing up in our hearts.

In Proverbs, we see that *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30).*

Good fruit brings Life. It nourishes and strengthens those around us. Paul contrasts this with the fruit from the bad seed in Ephesians: *“Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:8-11).* Here, by “unfruitful,” I believe Paul is saying “un-nourishing.” The works of darkness are not spiritually nutritious, rather, they are poisonous: *“[f]or while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (Romans 7:5).*

What does this poisonous fruit look like? Paul gives us a picture in Galatians: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Galatians 5:19-21).*

When we see these things in our own lives or in the lives of others, we are seeing the fruit of the flesh ripening on the vine. It is a warning of the seed that has sprouted in the heart and threatens to poison everything around it. Only the “Husbandman” or “Vinedresser” can weed these seeds out of our hearts. Jesus said clearly that our Heavenly Father tends the seed of His Word and removes the spiritual plants that are unhealthy: *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by*

itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned'” (John 15:1-6).

We can produce no good fruit unless we abide in the saving grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Salvation is not by works or by our fruits. *“One is justified by faith apart from works...” (Romans 3:28).* Faith comes first and works (or fruit) follows, not for our own benefit, but for the nourishing of others. Jesus makes it clear here that God is constantly tending his seed in us. He prunes believers to encourage more fruit to grow, but He uproots the seed that is not His own: *“Every plant that my Heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13).*

Today, as throughout history, we see some men and women trying to graft the Word of God into different roots, instead of into Jesus Christ. They preach a distorted gospel and have twisted the Word of God to suit their own selfish purposes. We call this heresy or apostasy and Paul warns against it when he says that *“even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).* It is clear here that nourishing any other seed in place of the Gospel or springing from any root other than Christ puts us in danger of becoming unfruitful and under the curse of death, bearing its poisonous fruit. What are we cultivating in our lives? What are we growing up into?

Let us encourage one another to root more deeply into Christ and His word. Let us each pray that we will grow into Him more fully. He is the source of our salvation and He alone has said to us: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7).*

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. All believers have Life because of Him. We are partakers in His spiritual nature. We have Life because He is Life. We have been rescued from spiritual and physical death as Paul explains in Romans: *“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).*

The life we partake of in Him spiritually is not fully realized here on earth in our mortal bodies but will be when He resurrects those who have fallen asleep on the last day and those who will be translated into His presence. On that day we will have Eternal Life with Him, partaking of God's sustaining spiritual nature. On that day, we will see as John saw *“the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:1-2).*

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14).