

The tender Twig of which God has planted an everlasting kingdom

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: ²³ In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. ²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

Dear Christians,

In Psalm 132:11,12, God gives tells of the promise which He made concerning the throne of David. There He declares, "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore." If you read this promise carefully, you will notice that it is not one, but two promises. The first is absolute, the second, conditional. The absolute promise speaks of Christ, the eternal King, who would come as the fruit of David's body, a natural born descendant. Nothing would prevent His coming. The conditional promise, however, only applied to the children of David until the time of Christ. If they kept the covenant of the Lord, then they also would remain upon the throne forevermore. As anyone familiar with the history of Israel will know, the condition was broken almost immediately. Solomon, the first child of David to sit upon the throne, after a life of wisdom and faithfulness, fell away and went after other gods, and nearly every king after him did the same. Therefore the Lord took away the throne from David's line. Our sermon text is a parable from the very end of that line, from the time of the last Davidian King, right at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity.

We hear once more of the royal tree of David, and of the Branch, who would rise up when the stump was dead. But now we hear how God preserved the branch, and kept it until the day that it would bear fruit in Christ Jesus.

The Lord our God is truly a maker and breaker of kings. He ordains the kingdoms of the world, when they begin, how far they will extend, how long their power will last, and when they will fall. So also the Lord our God is the maker of the greatest King of all, the man, Jesus Christ, whom He made both of the virgin Mary, and of His eternally begotten Son.

Yet there are other king makers in this world. We often hear rumors of powerful men in our day who take it upon themselves to setup and take down nations and their rulers.

This is nothing new. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon also delighted in tearing down and setting up kingdoms. He tore down the kingdom of Judah. The Lord God had ordained that Judah fall because she was wicked continually, and would not repent. He even sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people not to resist their new rulers. But the proud of Israel, especially the current King, did not listen.

The first verses of this chapter in Ezekiel talk about Nebuchadnezzar. They call him a colored eagle, who clipped off an uppermost branch of the tree of David, and took it to a good place, and planted it. Nebuchadnezzar had planned to re-establish Zedekiah as king over Judah, only now he would rule at the behest of Babylon. The plan backfired. Zedekiah, after making an oath of allegiance with Nebuchadnezzar, broke his oath and turned to the king of Egypt, and attempted to make an alliance with him against Babylon. This attempt failed, and the wrath of the Chaldeans was brought down upon Zedekiah. He and his military were crushed. If he had submitted to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, as the prophet Jeremiah had urged him to do, this would not have happened. But his own treachery came back upon him. But Nebuchadnezzar also failed to organize the kingdom of Israel under his power. So far the folly and pride of man.

In our lesson, God declares that where man failed, God would not fail. He too took a twig from the branch of the great tree of David. While the rest of the tree withered and dried up and died, only this twig remained. God spirited it away, and planted it up on a high mountain, where no one would notice it, and were certainly no one would expect a tree to take root. Nevertheless, it did take root, because the Lord Himself tended it. It was a tender branch, that is, it was weak and small. For this reason also it went unnoticed. Yet, even from its lowly and obscure estate, it took root, and grew into a mighty tree, a stately cedar, glorious and beautiful, and it bore much fruit. Within its branches were sheltered every kind of bird. By this tree, all men would know that God has kept His promise, even when all of man's might had failed. It is He that brought down the mighty tree, the last of the Davidian Kings, Zedekiah. So also it was He that preserved the tender twig, and brought it forth into the world in the fulness of time.

The tender twig is Christ Jesus, for God preserved his ancestors from destruction, through their humility and lowliness. There was nothing regal about them. They were poor people. And when Christ Jesus was born, He was the poorest and lowliest of all. He was born in a desperate way, in the least ideal of circumstances, while his mother and step-father were forced by governmental decree to travel. No clothing but strips of cloth were His, and no bed but a manger. He was small and weak, and had mighty enemies. When he was still but a child, unknown by all but a few, Harod, king of Israel, sought to take his life. He was forced to flee into even more

obscurity, to go into the land of Egypt. The place which once sheltered the children of Jacob from famine now sheltered Jesus from persecution. Yet out of Egypt God called His Son, and Jesus returned to the land of His birth to fulfill His destiny as the Savior of the world.

This branch was the most humble and impoverished, yet it was also the best. He was cut from the highest branch, that closest of all to heaven, and furthest from the root. He would be the last in David's line. After Him, the entire tree of David was permanently cut off. After Jerusalem was destroyed, all the remaining descendants of David were scattered abroad throughout the nations until by intermarriage the line of David died. Only this one descendent remained, Jesus Christ. And as He is the only one of His line who remains, it is He alone who lives to fulfill the promise that God made to David. Jesus is the man who will sit upon the throne forever.

The Lord God planted the twig upon a high mountain, where it grew into a mighty tree, and bore fruit. Because the Lord nurtured Him, Jesus survived the attempts on His life while he was but a babe. Through poverty and lowliness God preserved the life of the most regal child ever born in the world. And because God ordained that His Son would not fail, He grew up into a mighty tree, and bore much fruit. In life, He continued in His humility, so the might of that tree went unseen by many. But the fruits of His might became evident soon. His miracles, performed out of love, were the most visible fruit. The blind and deaf, paralyzed and every sort of disease were cured by Jesus out of His compassion. Even death had to yield to the power of Christ as he raised some to life again. His preaching is the next fruit, and by it thousands learned the wisdom of God. He taught men what the Word of God really said, and shattered the illusions which men had concerning what God required of them. He showed to men the perfect holy life that God demanded first by living it Himself, and second by preaching about it. But the fruits of this tree did not stop there, for where man must fail to please God, Jesus offered His own life for them. Therefore the greatest fruit of all is the mighty work of salvation, the redemption of all men. By this He won the forgiveness of sins, which is the low-hanging fruit of the tree, so that all might come and eat of that fruit. This tree is the tree of life.

Under it dwell birds of every wing, every kind and color. They take shelter in the shadow of its branches. Even so, every sort of person is welcomed by Christ. His own people the Jews, and Gentiles from every nation on the earth dwell under the shadow of Christ's love, for He is a Savior for all men.

And the child who was born in obscurity and lowliness did not remain either lowly or obscure. First all men came to know of Him. His enemies took notice. They despised His miracles for they were threatened by His power. They despised even more the many who came to Jesus because of His

love. They looked with derision upon the sinners whom Jesus so graciously forgave. And they plotted His death. They thought they had succeeded, for Jesus in his humbleness would not so much as lift a finger to protect Himself. They took Him and crucified Him. But in His death, His power blossomed. The tree which was once a tender twig was now a mighty cedar. His roots were deep and enduring, and by His might He overcame the death which he was given. He arose more glorious than before. And so even His enemies learned that they had no power at all except that which the Lord allowed them. All the trees of the field came to know that the Lord brought down the high tree, dried up the green tree, and made the dry tree, the twig from the tree that was but a stump, to flourish. Every man must now look upon God's Christ and know that God has ordered the course of the whole world. Even when Satan exercised all His power against Christ, this played right into the hands of our mighty Lord, who valiantly received the death which He was dealt, and transformed death into life.

Therefore let all men be wise, and learn of God's Christ. Learn that in the end, the Lord God shall prevail, and every human scheme will fail. Let every Christian who shelters under the branches of this mighty tree rejoice and be glad. For His victory is our salvation, a salvation which no power in heaven and earth can defeat. The tender twig, the Child Jesus, is our mighty salvation. May God grant us the grace to continue under His branches until all creation, even His enemy, death, is brought under subjection. Amen.