

The Trees of the Field, and Their Appointed Destiny

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and the need for God to bring us down from our high and proud state, and to exalt us when we are low and humble.

Scripture: Job 8:16, Psalm 51:17, Psalm 92:12, Isaiah 57:15, Isaiah 61:3, Ezekiel 17:24, James 4:10

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Humility"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on the transformative work of the Lord in different characters represented by trees: the high tree symbolizing presumptuous professors, the low tree representing humble souls, the green tree depicting zealous but fleshly believers, and the dry tree signifying those feeling spiritually barren. Philpot emphasizes God's promise to bring down the proud, exalt the humble, dry up the fleshly zeal, and make the barren soul flourish through His sovereign work. He challenges listeners to examine their spiritual state and trust in God's transformative power to bring genuine humility, revival, and fruitfulness.

Transcript

A sermon preached on June 13, 1841, by J. C. Philpot, at Zoar Chapel, London.

"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." Ezekiel 17:24

It seems impossible, as Deer justly speaks, to chalk out a path of Christian experience, and to say that all the children of God shall walk in some precise path, which shall be particularly laid down. The all-wise God has various ways of bringing his children to the knowledge of himself; and he will baffle all the wisdom of man, so that none shall be able to prescribe a path for God, or confine him within those narrow limits which our fallen mind is continually attempting to assign to the Almighty.

But though we can lay down no one path of Christian experience, nor set up one rigorous standard whereby to measure all the children of God, yet doubtless there are certain great outlines of Divine teaching which are to be traced out in the hearts and consciences of all the elect family. There is a vast difference between setting up one rigorous standard, and cutting off every one that does not come up to these prescribed limits, and casting aside all standards altogether. There are certain great branches of

truth which must be experimentally felt and known; there are certain leading outlines of Divine teaching which must be engraved by the Spirit upon every quickened heart; and he that is not personally and individually acquainted with these grand outlines, does not bear the stamp of being one of God's regenerated family.

For instance, "Repent and believe the Gospel;" if there is no repentance, if there is no believing the Gospel, there must be the absence of Divine teaching. "This is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent," if there is no internal, spiritual, experimental knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ the Mediator, there must be the absence of eternal life in the soul. If there are no convictions of sin, there must be an absence of the work of the Spirit, who "convinces of sin," and brings the soul in "guilty before God." If there is a lack of faith in the Mediator, there is the absence of another decisive stamp, whereby God has marked his people. And so we might enlarge upon the various outlines of Christian truth and the grand branches of internal experience, and say that where these grand outlines are lacking, where these branches of Divine truth are not experimentally known, there we have decisive evidence that God the Holy Spirit has not quickened that soul into spiritual and eternal life.

Now the Lord, in his word, seems to have laid down certain grand rules of procedure by which he works. For instance - "Every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." That is a rule of the Divine procedure, according to which he works, which rule never can be violated in one instance. And in this verse the last of the chapter, from which I hope, with God's blessing, to deliver a few thoughts this evening, we have a rule of the Divine procedure, analogous to that which I have just quoted - "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." Therefore, if our experience--think of it what we may--does not run in the channel which God himself has marked out - if it is not in strict accordance with the grand outlines which the Holy Spirit himself has drawn in the word of truth - upon that experience we must write "Tekel, weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

We will, then, with God's blessing, apply this rule, which the Lord himself has laid down, and according to which he works, to our experience, such as it is; and if our experience cannot stand the test of that rule, we must write "Ichabod" upon it; we must stamp "Tekel" in large letters upon its forehead. "All the trees of the field 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."

The Lord speaks here of four different trees, or rather of four trees in different states; and he tells us in this verse what his work is towards and upon these trees. And in the unfolding of this, I shall endeavor, with the Lord's blessing, to employ the time that we shall remain together this evening.

"All the trees of the field, then, shall know" a certain truth. What are these "trees of the field?" "The field" seems to set forth the visible Church of God; and "the trees of the field" seem to set forth all the professors of Divine truth, whether they are possessors or not. "The trees of the field" do not here seem to signify the quickened family of God, but those trees which openly stand in the field - those people that have an outward standing in Christ's visible church here below. We find that the Scriptures often speak of people, not as they really are, but as they profess to be. For instance, the Lord says, "Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away." Now, he speaks of that "branch," not as it really is, but as it professes to be. The branch never was "in him;" but the branch professed to be in him, and therefore, in using those words

he spoke of the branch as what it professed to be, and not what it really was.

So with respect to the "trees of the field," the Lord takes them upon the broad basis of profession. They profess to be "trees of righteousness which the Lord has planted;" they profess to stand forth in the woods of the Lord's own implantation. The Lord takes them according to their own profession; not now passing any decisive sentence as to what they really are in his sight, but assuming, upon the broad basis of their own profession, that they are "trees of the field," that is, members of his visible Church here below. The trees, then, of this field are all that stand in the visible Church of God, all whose eyes are in any measure open, naturally or spiritually, to see truth, all that have made any separation from a "world lying in wickedness," all that profess to receive "the truth as it is in Jesus," all that stand forth to contend for the Gospel in its purity and power. All these trees, whether they be trees of God's planting, or whether they be planted by Satan - all these members of professing churches, all these branches of the vine, whether in it by reality, or in it only by profession - all these "trees of the field" shall know a certain truth.

Now, what is this certain truth? That the Lord will do a certain work towards, and a certain work in characters, which he himself has delineated; and that it shall be visible to the Church of God what he does to those characters, which his own hand has drawn as they really stand before his heart-searching eye.

I. Now, the first character of which the Lord speaks is the "HIGH tree;" which is to be "brought down." That expression - a "high tree" - seems to bear two significations.

1. There is the "high tree" - that is, a nominal professor, who is destitute of the fear of God, who has nothing of the grace of God in his soul, but stands in the visible Church of Christ in a profession of godliness, while he is inwardly devoid of its power. With such the Church is overrun, and I believe that there is no Church--let us talk of the purity of a Church as much as we please--that is free from these trees, which are not "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that he may be glorified," but have been introduced by Satan into the Church with a profession of religion, when their hearts are utterly devoid of the power of vital godliness experienced therein.

This "high tree," then, is a high, towering, lofty, soaring, presumptuous professor, whose head is thoroughly stored with the doctrines of grace, but who is destitute of the feeling power of vital godliness in his soul; one unburdened, unexercised, untempted, untried; who has never felt the powerful hand of God upon him to crush him into the dust; who has never fallen down before the throne of God's majesty and mercy as a ruined wretch without hope or help; who has never been brought in guilty before the Lord - never been reduced to complete beggary, poverty, and insolvency in self; but is a natural man still in a profession of religion, and has experienced nothing of the sovereign teachings and Divine operations of God the Holy Spirit in his conscience.

Now the Lord the Spirit has stamped him with a certain mark - that he is a "high tree." He is not the creeping ivy; he is not the vine that cannot climb without a support; but he towers aloft in head-knowledge, soars upward in presumptuous confidence, rises up to the clouds in the lofty imaginations of his unhumbled heart, and looks down with haughty contempt and pride of heart upon those who are groaning, and sighing, and mourning, beneath a body of sin and death. In this woods of trees, the first object that catches the eye is "the high tree," that soars above them all. You will find this nominal professor in the Church of Christ always ready to come forward, he never hangs back through a sense of his weakness and ignorance; he is never plagued with doubts and fear as to his state before God; he never puts his mouth in the dust from a deep sense of his vileness and baseness before him; but let him be present in

any company, or on any occasion, he is ready to speak, to exalt himself, and to tower high above the family of God, who are mourning and sighing over the burden of sin, guilt, and corruption, and are suing after the Lord's manifestations of favor to their souls.

Now the Lord says, "All the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree." Then this "high tree" must be "brought down;" and not merely brought down, but visibly brought down - brought down in the sight of the trees of the field, laid low in the sight of all who have eyes to see, who have ears to hear, who have minds to understand what God's dealings are.

Some of these "high trees" the Lord "brings down," by allowing them to fall into open sin. No man has sin subdued in him, except that man who has the fear of God in his heart, "as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death;" all others are under the dominion of sin; they are, as the Lord declares, "the servants of sin;" they think themselves free, but sin secretly "reigns in their mortal body, and they obey it in the lusts thereof." Now the Lord, in order that all the trees of the woods may "know that God brings down the high tree," often allows these high towering professors to fall into some notorious sin, whereby they stand disgraced before the eyes of Christ's Church, and are branded as mere professors of vital godliness, utterly destitute of the feeling power. But the Lord has another way of "bringing down" this high tree; and that is, by smiting him with the stroke of vengeance in his conscience, so as to plunge him into all the horrors of despair. There is many a towering professor, who has soared high in false liberty, and reared his presumptuous head into the heaven of his high notions, that when he has come to die, has "howled upon his bed," as smitten with the rod of God's eternal vengeance, and breathed forth his guilty soul in all the horrors of despair in whose gnawing conscience the foretaste of eternal wrath and the flames of a devouring hell are kindled before he is precipitated by the avenging hand of God into it. And thus the Lord makes this man a manifest spectacle before others, by "bringing down the high tree," and casting him from his towering altitude into the depths of hell.

2. But the expression "high tree," bears another signification. Whence comes the presumption of self-confident professors? Does it not spring from an internal principle of PRIDE in them? And are not all, without exception, possessed of the same "deceitful and desperately wicked" heart? Then if the towering confidence of a presumptuous professor springs from innate pride, is there not the same principle at work in the heart of a living child? Cases continually occur - no, if the Lord did not mercifully prevent, every one of us would fall into the snare - cases continually occur, where a living soul, one whom God has taken in hand and taught by his Spirit, through the subtlety of Satan, the pride of his heart and the workings of a deceitful nature, is elevated into a false confidence, stands in false liberty, and towers high in notion beyond the work of grace upon his heart.

Were "Jerusalem searched as with candles," we would find many such among the real people of God. And whence come they? What makes the tree spindle up in a forest? Is it not the company of other high towering trees? What draws them up into an unnatural altitude, and causes them to spindle high, without throwing out their branches horizontally, or spreading their roots in the soil? Why, it is the neighborhood of other lofty trees, which draws them up to this unnatural height. Now, so it is in the churches. "Bad company corrupts good manners." Three or four presumptuous professors in a church of the living God will draw up into high notions and presumptuous confidence, if God permits it, even some of the living family.

And there is another source of this presumption and vain confidence in the hearts of God's children; which is, sitting under ministers who stand themselves in a presumptuous confidence, who shoot their arrows

against the exercises of God's tried family, who ridicule with sarcasm and bitter contempt the doubts and fears and guilt and trouble of the living family of Zion, and have their bolt to shoot at every one that stands not in the same presumptuous liberty with themselves. Under these tall upas trees, these lofty soaring ministers in the letter, are the family of God sometimes drawn up out of their real stature. They are drawn up into an ambitious aim to be like those, under whose ministry they continually sit; and they get fostered in presumption by constantly hearing a ministry which is full of it. Thus they become "high trees."

But the Lord will never allow his dear children to walk in vain confidence; he will never allow them, for a long season together, to stand in false liberty; and therefore he will "bring them down." "All the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree." The Lord will "bring down the high tree" in a way of judgment to the reprobate, but in a way of mercy to the elect.

And how does he "bring it down?" By letting the soul know a little of what it really is, by opening up some of the secrets of that deep fountain of internal corruption, which we carry about with us; by bringing perhaps heavy trials in providence, so as to strip us of every hope and of every help, but that which stands in God only; and by shooting his arrows of conviction into our conscience, whereby distress and anguish and guilt and misery and condemnation are internally felt. The Lord has but to touch us with his finger, and down comes all vain confidence. He has but to look upon us with one frown, and he will bruise into nothingness all our presumptuous liberty. He has but to take the veil for a moment off our hearts, and discover to us what we are, and discover to us what he is, and we shall fall down before him, as Isaiah fell when he saw the glory of the Lord in the temple. Our "loveliness will be turned into corruption," as it was when Daniel saw the "great vision;" and we shall "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes," as did Job, when he had "heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but now saw him with his eye." Thus the "high tree" must be "brought down."

The Lord sometimes allows his people to go on for years in a kind of half confidence, they themselves all the time suspecting that there is something wrong, but still not brought to the light clearly - "hoping against hope," - endeavoring to bolster up themselves with rotten props; but the moment he puts his hand upon them, the moment he discovers his holy indignation and wrath against sin in them, he strips them of their vain confidence, and down they go into the deep billows of trouble and despair, "deep calling unto deep at the noise of God's waterfalls," and all the waves and billows of God's wrath seem to roll over their heads. Then they are "brought down." Their false liberty disappears; their vain confidence is destroyed; their hope is removed; their faith seems to vanish out of their hearts; and they stand as on the very brink of hell in the sight of God, fearing lest every moment should thrust them into eternal perdition. Here is the "high tree brought down." And depend upon it, friends, if you are never "brought down," you will never be lifted up; depend upon it, if the grace of God has never humbled you, and broken you into nothingness before God, you will never be sweetly exalted by the manifestations of Christ to lift you up into himself.

II. And now we come to the "exalting the LOW tree." Here we have a striking contrast. We have been looking at the "high tree," waving above every other tree in the forest, like the lofty poplar, towering so as to be visible above every other tree of the wood; and now we have "the low tree" - the vine that cannot sustain itself - the ivy that must creep and crawl upon the ground, with no power or ability to stand without a support. Now, "the low tree" represents a child of God, who is low in his own soul; all whose righteousness have been manifested unto him as "filthy rags;" whose heart is broken, whose spirit is contrite, whose conscience is tender, who has been laid low by a work of grace upon his heart, so as to have nothing and be nothing, but is a poor, ruined, wretched, guilty, sinful, helpless, and hopeless creature, that "cannot lift up so much as his eye unto heaven."

"The low tree" is one who has always the lowest, lowest thoughts concerning himself; who can find in his heart nothing spiritually good; who is continually afraid of presumption; who starts back from every appearance of being more than he really is, or speaking more than he really feels; and is kept down day by day, thinking nothing of himself, and "esteeming others better than himself;" full of self-aborrence and self-loathing on account of a feeling sense of his vileness before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. "The low tree" is one who can speak little, because he has little to speak of but his wretchedness and misery, his helplessness, his weakness, his vileness, and his baseness. "The low tree" is one who crouches and lies at the feet of God, until the Lord is pleased graciously to smile. "The low tree" is one who keeps back, and dares not come forward, lest by coming forward he should rush into presumption.

There is no place low enough for the "low tree;" there is no posture humble enough for him to take; there are no words too strong to express the internal feelings of his broken heart; and there is no language which can adequately express all that he feels himself to be before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. He is nothing - he has nothing - he can find nothing in his heart spiritually good, but he stands before God and he stands before the people of God a mass of disease, a leper, a bankrupt, a beggar, poor and needy - "from the crown of the head to the soul of the foot, full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores."

Now this "low tree" the Lord has promised to "exalt." But he will never "exalt the low tree" in SELF. The wise man shall not "glory in his wisdom," the strong man shall not "glory in his strength;" but "he that glories" shall "glory in this, that he knows the Lord." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." "He that glories, let him glory in the Lord." When "the low tree," therefore, is "exalted," it is by some sweet manifestation of the blood and love of Jesus to his soul; it is by lifting him up out of the mire and out of the ash-heap, and "setting him among princes," and making him "inherit the throne of glory;" it is by Jesus sweetly coming into his heart and conscience, sprinkling it with his atoning blood, bedewing it with the drops of his favor, discovering his glorious righteousness, and binding up every bleeding wound.

Then the "low tree" is "exalted," when he is sweetly and blessedly lifted up by manifestations of Divine favor; when the showers of the "early and the latter rain" drop into his parched heart; and he is able to see his name cut upon Jesus' heart, and worn upon Jesus' shoulder, and has a sweet and blessed testimony in his conscience, that he is savingly interested in that love which knows no bounds, which has neither length nor breadth, nor height nor depth, but passes knowledge. Then he is "exalted." But he is never exalted into presumptuous confidence; he is never exalted into fleshly liberty; he is never exalted into self-righteousness. The more he is exalted, the more is he humbled; the higher he rises, the lower he falls; and the clearer views he has of his saving interest in Jesus, the more is his soul melted within him, the more is his heart broken, the more is his conscience made tender; and he cannot find any place too low for him to sink into, the more the Lord sheds abroad and manifests his favor and his love to his soul.

Oh! this is the only exaltation, friends, which is really worth coveting; not to soar high into the air, and to tower aloft into presumptuous notions, but to be exalted to lie at the feet of the Savior, to lean the head upon the bosom of Jesus, to be exalted not in self, but in Christ, so as to have a sweet manifestation of Christ's eternal and dying love to our souls. This is the exaltation which a broken heart covets; and it covets, and can have, and desires to have none other.

III. But we pass on to consider another tree of which the Lord speaks, and another work which the Lord here promises to do. "I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the GREEN tree." Now, just in the same way as "the high tree" seems to shadow forth two characters that is, the presumptuous professor, and a child of God drawn aside by Satan's subtlety into presumption - so

"the green tree" seems to set forth both a professor of religion, and also a child of God in the warmth of youthful zeal.

1. That the profession of religion, without the power of it, is set forth by "the green tree," is evident from what we read in the eighth chapter of the book of Job, where Bildad, speaking of a hypocrite, says - "He is green before the sun, and his branch shoots forth in his garden; his roots are wrapped about the heap, and sees the place of stones; if he destroys him from his place then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen you. Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow." There he compares the hypocrite to "the bulrush and the papyrus," that grow in the mud and mire, which are "greener than any other herb." So that we have a scriptural warrant for explaining this "green tree" of a hypocrite in religion, a mere professor of vital godliness, destitute of the feeling power of it.

He is "green;" that is, there is about him a kind of verdure. In prayer, he is always fluent - a gifted man. In conversation, his memory is wonderfully stored with texts of Scripture. In doctrines, he is so thoroughly versed that he is a master of all controversy. In zeal, he is so fervent, that he is continually, in every company, and on every occasion, setting forth religion; and he is often the plague of God's poor, tried, and exercised family, because he can always pray and always talk, and always seem to have religion uppermost in him, while they perhaps feel themselves as dry, and as stupid, and as hard, and as dead, and as barren, and as cold as the very seats which they sit upon. Here, then, is the "green tree," bloated with merely natural verdure, springing up out of the mud and mire of corrupt nature; not filled with a greenness of God's own giving, but a greenness that springs out of nature's operations.

Now, the Lord says, "I will dry up the green tree." Have we not often seen professors, who seemed to stand forth with great gifts in prayer, or perhaps minister with great gifts in preaching, who drew large congregations to hear them, and seemed to stand forth as champions for "the truth as it is in Jesus?" And did not a blight come over them? Did not "their sun go down at noon?" Have they not been drawn aside into manifest errors? And are there not, in this metropolis, men who formerly stood forth as champions for the truth in the letter, who have been drawn aside into the worst of errors, and the worst of delusions? Then the Lord had fulfilled his promise. He has "dried up the green tree."

And is it not a matter of experience with respect to those in churches who once seemed full of zeal, and full of life, earnestness, and power in religion, that a sudden blast has come over them, and they have lost all their gifts, they have become dried up, they have now nothing to say, and their barrenness and their nakedness stand exposed before the eyes of all? Such are God's righteous dealings, who will never sanction any religion that did not come from himself, and will never cause that to prosper which his own right hand has not planted. "Every tree which my Father has not planted shall be rooted up."

2. But "the green tree" also sets forth what many of God's people are in their early days. What zeal, what warmth, what fervor, we seem to have in our souls in the springtide of life, after the Lord has been pleased to indulge us with some testimony, and to give us some pledge of his eternal favor! Now, the greater part of this zeal was in the flesh; most of this ardor sprang from the mere workings of nature. This sort of holy fervor arose much from the workings of an excited, heated imagination; it did not come from God. Though there was; "the root of the matter in us," yet this zeal, this fervor, this earnestness, this running here and running there, this carrying everything by storm - all these things were not really of God, but they were nature dressed in and wearing the appearance of grace. Now, the Lord says of this "green tree," that he will "dry it up;" that is, he will bring this "green tree" into a state of felt destitution and barrenness. Have we not found it so? Where is our zeal gone? Has it not evaporated? Where is our youthful fervor? Has it not

taken flight? Where are our ardent prayers and burning desires? Have they not sunk low, and burnt down well near to ashes within? Then "the green tree" has been "dried up;" and we are brought, by a work of God's hand upon our hearts we trust, to stand in the position which God has described the fourth tree to be in - a "dry tree."

IV. Oh! what a state it is in which to stand before God - a "dry tree!" To feel as though there was not a single particle of spiritual sap or heavenly moisture in us; to feel as though we had no religion worth the name; to feel as though we had no real work of the Spirit upon our soul, and no real grace in our heart given by God himself! Oh! what a state it is to be in! - a state of dryness before God, and dryness before the people of God; to find, in our approaches unto God, our hearts dry; to find, in reading the Scriptures of truth, our hearts dry; to find, in conversation with the family of God, our hearts dry - dry to the promises, dry to the consolations, dry to the reproofs, dry to the instructions, dry to every blessing that God has promised to his elect, and as unable to revive our own souls, as unable to communicate greenness and fertility to our own hearts, as the blasted tree in the forest is unable to clothe itself again with verdure, and to put forth flowers and fruit!

Here stands the "green tree," then, or rather, that which once was green, among the trees of the field; all its fruits fallen off, all its flowers withered; its leaves perhaps holding on; but, like the oak in winter, the dry and dead leaves, instead of the green and verdant foliage, with which it was once clothed. Oh! to fear that we are standing there, as "dry trees" for God to pluck up by the roots, and cast into everlasting flames. Oh! to have our religion dried up, and to feel in our hearts that there is nothing there like moisture, and sap, and dew, and unction, and verdure.

Now, to this "dry tree" the Lord has given a promise. He says, this dry tree shall be "made to flourish." Oh! what a wonder-working God it is! In what mysterious paths does he move! How he frustrates and disappoints all the expectations of nature. What! to "dry up a green tree," and to "make a dry tree to flourish!" Would not nature say, "Oh! the 'green tree,' make it greener still; oh! the 'dry tree,' cut it down and cast it into the fire!" But the Lord's "ways are not our ways," neither are the Lord's "thoughts our thoughts;" but "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts." Cut it down! No - "make it to flourish!" Then the Lord's work is made manifest, as much in "drying up the green tree," as in "making the dry tree to flourish."

And how does he "make the dry tree to flourish?" Why, by dropping in his own blessed dew into it; by shedding his own divine favor into the barren and parched heart; by dropping in some testimony from his own blessed and gracious lips, so as to cause the soul to "revive as the vine," and to flourish as the herb; by causing "showers of blessing" to fall upon the wilderness, and so make the rose of Sharon sweetly and blessedly to blossom and flourish therein.

There are times, then, when the Lord condescends to "make the dry tree to flourish;" that is, drops in some testimony, gives some smile, affords some visit, applies some promise, brings in some part of his holy word with power, and by doing this makes the dry tree flourish again in all its former youth, put forth the green leaves of profession, the fragrant flowers of promise, and the ripe fruits of a godly life, conduct, and conversation.

Now the Lord CONCLUDES, "I the Lord have spoken it." It has passed from my lips; it is not the word of man, it is the word of the living God. Aye, and more than that; "I have done it;" not only spoken it, that it shall take place - but effected it, that it does take place.

"And all the trees of the field shall know" it. It shall be made manifest in the eyes of God's visible Church. And how? By these wonderful transformations taking place before their eyes; by their seeing these characters visibly made manifest by the sovereign operations and dealings of God.

Then you that are members of the visible Church of Christ you whose eyes are opened to see character - wait, watch, observe; and you will see how strikingly God will bring these things to pass.

Where are you? If you are a tree of the field, if you are a professor of religion, you are one of these trees. Are you a "high tree" - a lofty, towering, soaring presumptuous professor? Read your lot. God has written your destiny; he has stamped it in his own word, by his own infallible hand; you shall be "brought down!" You cannot frustrate it; God has said it, and what God has said, must be accomplished. Then, if you have no grace in your heart, and are a towering, presumptuous, lofty, soaring professor, hear your doom from the mouth of God himself - you shall be "brought down" to the chambers of hell.

But have you grace in your heart, and yet have been drawn aside by the presumptuous confidence of others, and have swerved from the simplicity of the Gospel and have outgrown your real stature, and have "intruded into things that you have not seen, vainly puffed up by your fleshly mind?" Hear what the Lord will do for you; hear it from God's mouth - "He will bring you down, he will lay you low, by pressing you down with his powerful hand; he will bring down the pride of your heart, and lay you a ruined wretch at his footstool."

Are you a green tree? full of zeal, full of fervor, full of warmth, trying to convert everybody, as full of religion as ever you can hold? Hear what God has said - You shall be "dried up." If your zeal springs from nature, if your fervor comes only from the workings of your own heart, it will be dried up; it will be blasted, blighted, withered, extinguished, and you will give up sooner or later even the very profession of religion, and perhaps go back into the world whence you came.

If you are a living soul, and have much of this "greenness" of youth about you, and this verdure which is not of God's giving, hear what the Lord will do for you. He will "dry you up." Perhaps in our early days some of us have been in this spot; we have looked at God's tried, doubting, exercised, fearing family, and said, "What have these professors been about? They are not like me; they are so dead and they are so carnal, and they are so lifeless, and they are so barren, and they are so constantly talking about their wicked hearts. I know nothing about this, I find nothing of this, I can read, and I can talk, and I can pray, and I can hear, and I can love; I know nothing of this." Now, you must come to this spot, if you are a living soul. The Lord has said he will "dry up the green tree."

You must come to learn your spiritual barrenness, poverty, destitution, bankruptcy, insolvency nothingness; you must come to have every particle of spiritual sap and moisture dried up, and to stand before God without an atom of living power to infuse life and feeling into your own heart.

But now I come to two other characters in God's Church "the low tree," and "the dry tree." Has the Lord taught us, sensibly and feelingly, what we are by nature? Has he really humbled and broken our hearts to lie at his blessed footstool? Are we low in a low place; low in our opinions of ourselves, low in our feelings, low in our frames, low in our experience, low in desponding thoughts of what our future state may be? O "low tree," the Lord will exalt you; low tree, he has brought you down, that he may lift you up. O low tree, it is in order to be exalted in Christ, by sweet manifestations of his love to your soul, that you are brought low.

You envy the soaring cedar; you envy the towering oak; you need not envy them. The judgement of the Lord of Hosts is "upon all the cedars of Lebanon, and upon all the oaks of Bashan;" but the hand of the Lord is not upon "the low tree" - the creeping vine, whose feeble tendrils must cling round a support in order to prop it up. Low tree, the Lord will blessedly exalt you in his own time and in his own way.

But are you a "dry tree?" Oh! wretched feeling - oh! miserable state in soul experience - to be a "dry tree;" to feel no spiritual sap nor heavenly moisture, but to stand a withered monument as it were of what we once were - to stand like a lofty tree of the forest in its winter garb, without anything to which we can look with pleasure, and say, "This is the handiwork of the Lord himself." If you are a "dry tree" spiritually so, you will be at times mourning your dryness; your barrenness will be your burden; your poverty will be your grief; your emptiness will be your sorrow - it will be a plague and a trouble to you, that you are so dry. You want to be otherwise, to be green and luxuriant and verdant, to bring forth flowers and fruit to the glory and praise of God.

Remember, dry tree, the Lord will cause you to flourish; yes, he will make your bones rejoice, and make you to flourish as the herb, by sweetly pouring into your soul his own sap and moisture. You are connected with the head of all influence; you are grafted into the living vine; you have a living union with the source of all spiritual sap and moisture, and out of his fullness they shall flow into your barren heart and dried-up soul.

O dry tree, it is better to be as you and I often feel ourselves - without a spiritual thought, without a spiritual desire, and yet sometimes sighing and groaning unto God from the poverty and destitution of our heart - it is better feelingly to stand a dry tree among the trees of the field, than to boast ourselves of false verdure, or adorn ourselves with fictitious fruit, and stand forth dressed in the livery of artificial leaves. It is better to feel ourselves wretched, and miserable, and blind, and poor, and naked, than to be like the Laodicean Church, which was all these things and knew it not, but thought she was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing."

Then try your state by this. If you are "low" by God's work upon your soul, it will be a mournful place to be in. If you are "dry" by God's having dried up your earthly moisture, it will be a grief and a plague to you. It is not catching up just the 'language of humility'; it is not talking about a broken heart and a contrite spirit; it is having the deep feeling of it within. It is easy enough to catch from the mouth of others - "I am so dead, and I am so carnal, and I am so cold," - and learn that cuckoo-note, and keep repeating it all the year round.

But where it is really felt, it is a burden; where it is really felt, it is a grief; where it is really felt, it is a trouble; as the Spirit of God works the feeling, the soul is ardently longing to be brought out of dryness and barrenness and destitution, into the light, life, joy, peace, and liberty of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, and to have a sweet manifestation of his eternal love to our hearts.

That man's religion is much to be suspected, who says he is "dry" and yet never feels his dryness - who is in language "low" and is never humbled before a heart-searching God. Where there is a real poverty, there will be a sighing after real riches; where there is a real emptiness, there will be a sighing after a reception out of Christ's fullness; and where there is a real barrenness and drought, there will be a sighing after the showers of God's favor to make the wilderness blossom as the rose.

"I the Lord have spoken, and have done it." It is not to be frustrated; "I the Lord will do it in my time."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/the-trees-of-the-field-and-their-appointed-destiny/>

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