

THE STORY OF THE CROSS

Don Randolph

FREE AT LAST

I SAW A WORD CARVED IN A TREE
IT SAID REPENT I HAVE SET YOU FREE.
GAZING CLOSER I CLEARLY SAW
THE LIVING WORD CLOTHED IN AWE.

I FELL DOWN FAST UPON MY KNEES
AS ROYAL BLOOD DRIPPED DOWN ON ME.
I LIFTED UP MY BLOOD DRENCHED EYES
I HEARD HIS VOICE, IT MADE ME CRY.

I GAZED BACK UP AT CALVARY'S TREE
AND SAW THE CROSS HE BORE WAS ME.
I KNEW THE CROSS WAS NOT HIS OWN.
YET THERE HE HUNG UPON MY THRONE.

HE SAID "MY FRIEND FORGET THE PAST
THE CURSE IS GONE YOU ARE FREE AT LAST.
THEY NAILED THESE HOLES INTO MY HANDS
TO GIVE YOUR SOUL A PLACE TO STAND.

TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

ISAIAH CHAPTER 61, VERSES 1-3

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD GOD IS UPON ME; BECAUSE THE LORD HATH ANNOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD TIDINGS TO THE MEEK; HE HATH SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND THE OPENING OF THE PRISON TO THEM THAT ARE BOUND; TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD, AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD; TO COMFORT ALL THAT MOURN; TO APPOINTED TO THEM THAT MOURN IN ZION, TO GIVE THEM BEAUTY FOR ASHES, THE OIL OF JOY FOR MOURNING, THE GARMENT OF PRAISE FOR THE SPIRIT OF HEAVINESS; THAT THEY MAY BE CALLED TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE PLANTING OF THE LORD, THAT HE MIGHT BE GLORIFIED.

In the Bible trees, and wood in general, are prophetic of mankind. The Bible has been written on parchment and paper over the centuries, which are byproducts of wood. This too is symbolic of God's Word being written and established in our hearts when we become believers in Christ Jesus. Even the ARK OF THE COVENANT was made out of wood and overlaid with gold. The Ark of the Covenant was a type and shadow of the heart of mankind that would one day be a vessel containing the WORD OF GOD. The Ten Commandments, the Showbread and Aaron's Rod that budded were placed in the Ark and the presence of God dwelt there as a type and shadow of things that were to come.

There are Scriptures in the Bible that call the Cross Jesus was crucified on a tree. Among them are: Acts, Chapter 5, Verse 30. Acts, Chapter 10, Verse 39. Acts, Chapter 13, Verse 29. Galatians, Chapter 3, Verse 13. First Peter, Chapter 2, Verse 24.

CHAPTER 1

MY STORY

Hello, my name is---well my name is not important. However, the story I want to share with you about myself might be of interest to you. My story has been written down in the annals of history. Many books have been written about me over the centuries, but none of them have told my side of the story. Many movies have been produced about me, and many sermons have been preached about me over the centuries. Yet nobody has heard the story of my life from my point of view.

My story starts about two thousand years ago on a mountain just outside the City of Jerusalem, called THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. You may have guessed by now that I am a tree. You are probably thinking that trees are not supposed to be able to communicate with people, but I assure you that when you finish reading about my life you will believe they can.

As a young sprout growing up on the mountain I was very naïve. My parents stood near the spot where I grew up. My Father would teach me many things about being a tree and how to enjoy life on the mountain. He warned me about the men who dwelt in and around the City of Jerusalem below. “Many of those men are not trustworthy and kind. The only one that you can trust is our Creator who lives in Heaven,” he would say. Over the years I would learn those lessons, as well as many others, the hard way.

My father taught me that, as trees, God had created us to serve mankind. God created all the tree families to help mankind to perform duties they themselves could not perform. Each family of trees were created for a specific purpose and God had placed within them the ability to perform the task for which they were created. "Always trust in God and He will make you a TREE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS," my father would say.

Many tree families had more than one purpose and could be used in several different ways. I was a member of the Olive Tree family. We were the most prominent trees which stood upon the mountain where I grew up. They even named the mountain after us. We were known far and wide for the oil we produced.

As an Olive tree I was created to produce olives and leaves for the people in the area to use in several different ways. My leaves were used to make medicine. My olives were used for food to nourish the people in the valley below. The oil from my olive berries was used for cooking and to be poured into lamps so mankind could see during periods of darkness.

Our oil was also used in the Lampstand in Temple of God which stood in the city below. The Religious leaders would also use oil to anoint people. Our oil was also used in lamps to help people see in the darkness of the night. There were many other things for which we were used, but I think you get the picture. Many times people would climb the mountain and sit under the leaves of the trees to protect them from the harsh sun during the summer months.

Some trees on the mountain were cut down and used to make housing and furniture for the people below. After being harvested a few of them had the distinction of being placed in the Palace of the King who ruled in the city below.

Unfortunately, many trees that were dead were cut down and used as firewood to keep the people below warm during the winter months and the cold evenings which were frequent. "I would hate to be used as firewood," I would think. "My usefulness to mankind would be short-lived and there would be nothing left of me but ashes to blow away in all directions by the wind."

When the olive trees grew older and could not produce fruit anymore they were cut down and used just like many of the others trees on the mountain. I heard that my uncle was used to make furniture and placed in the King's Palace below. My aunt was made into parchment. My father told me a Scribe penned the Holy Scriptures upon her to inform people of His will and purpose for their life.

My Father told me that one of his great grandfathers was used in Solomon's Temple to build an Altar for the Priests to offer up sacrifices to our Creator. "What an honor it would be to serve God as an Altar," I would think. As a young tree I would dream of being used in the Temple of God in some way. "To serve God in His Temple would be the ultimate joy," I thought. This became my lifelong dream. "Stay true to your calling and Jehovah, the Creator, will be able to use you in another capacity when you are no longer able to produce oil anymore," my father would say.

Many times as a young tree I would watch as men would climb the Mount of Olives and cut down trees and take them into the city below to cut and shape them into something they could use. The olive trees were also harvested when they passed their reproductive age.

At the bottom of the mountain next to the Eastern Wall of the city stood a small hill men called "Golgotha." It was also known as "The Place of the Skull." I would watch in horror as

men would climb the mountain to cut trees and make them into crucifixes. They would place them on the hill called Golgotha to punish men who were evil.

I always thought this to be a very cruel and unusual way to punish men for their crimes. In my mind no human being should ever have to be punished for their crimes in this way. It was most disturbing to see men die in this fashion.

Many times as I was growing up I stood on the Mount of Olives as men were placed on crosses and crucified. My leaves would shed tears, and my branches would bow in sorrow as men were mercilessly punished for their crimes outside the city below. "What a terrible way to punish people for their crimes," I would think. "Surely, there has to be a more humane way to punish men rather than make them suffer in such a horrific way."

As I grew older I heard many stories about the Temple of God which men had built in the city below, and how the Creator would bless the people as they worshipped Him there. As a youth I dreamed of one day being used in the Temple in some way just so I could be near God, my Creator.

I heard some men talking one day that even the trees would someday bow down and worship God. "What a joy that would be," I thought. "Maybe the Altar in the Temple would need to be replaced one day, and God would choose me to replace it," I would dream.

As I started to mature, I became bitter about many of the things which I saw going on around me. Sometimes heavy winds would come through and break off some of my weaker branches. One time two young boys came by and carved their initials in my trunk just for the fun of it.

One day a man was swinging on one of my larger branches. He was so heavy the branch broke off and fell to the ground. It was very painful, and it was the most beautiful branch I had. That branch bore more fruit than all of the other ones.

Later that same week two men were walking by me, arguing as they went. One man stopped and broke one of my branches off and started beating the other man with it. "How can mankind be so cruel to one another?" I thought.

Over the years men had treated me so cruelly I became very bitter toward them. I decided that if all men were like the ones I had encountered in my life I did not want to have anything to do with them anymore. So, I decided from then on to do my best to deprive them of the fruit they used to produce the food, medicine and oil they needed. I tried as hard as I could to become a dry tree.

CHAPTER 2

THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

One day as I was soaking up some sun through my leaves I noticed a man walking up the trail below which lead to the top of the Mount of Olives. The trail He was walking up passed right by me so I watched Him as He grew nearer and nearer. He seemed to be talking to someone, but I did not see anyone with Him.

He looked no different than any other man I had seen before, but I soon felt that there was something different about this man. The closer He came, the more I sensed there was something special about Him.

I didn't know who this man was, but I felt something was happening inside me. Every part of me from my deepest roots to the tips of my longest branches felt a strange, but wonderful sensation. The closer He came, the more my branches seemed to bow down in honor to Him. I did not understand what was happening, but I knew that this man's presence was giving me a peaceful warm feeling inside.

He walked up under the shade of my branches, which seemed to be bowing down to Him even more. Then He kneeled down in front of one of the rocks which lay beneath my shade. He folded His hands in front of Him and lifted up His eyes toward Heaven and began to pray to the Creator.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard Him say, "Father in Heaven I thank you that your mercy endures forever,

and that you love me YOUR ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.” “Am I hearing things?” I thought. “This man is calling God His Father--no man has ever called God his Father! “Who is this man? Why did He call God His Father?” I wondered. I didn’t know God had any sons.

I couldn’t understand how a man could call God his Father. I had heard other men who had visited the mountain say that all men were sinners by nature and that God’s nature was contrary to sinners. Yet, this man called God his Father. “How could God have a Son who was a sinner?” I thought. I was very confused.

After a couple of hours had passed by the man finished praying, lifted Himself back up off His knees, and walked back down the mountain. At the bottom of the mountain I saw a large crowd of people who seemed to be anxiously waiting for Him to return.

I watched intently as I witnessed Him healing people and casting out demons among the people in the crowd below. He performed wonderful miracles and signs among the people. After a while the crowd dispersed, and I saw this man leave the area with twelve other men.

The things I had seen, heard and felt puzzled me. For days I thought about what had transpired the day I first saw Him praying by the rock underneath my branches. “Was God really His Father?” I questioned. I wondered and pondered what it was that made me feel the way I did when He passed my way, and how I felt when I heard Him pray to God.

As the days went by, I wondered if and when I would encounter this amazing and unique one of a kind man again. Then one day as I was preparing for my morning sun bath, I started feeling that same peaceful and loving sensation I had felt a few days earlier. I became so excited I started to forget

about the bitterness I had toward mankind. All I could feel was great anticipation and expectation that I may be seeing Him again.

I looked down the trail, and there He was, walking up the mountain again. As He came closer great billows of peace and love filled my branches and they bowed down in honor to Him. My leaves felt a great sensation as a soft wind blew gently among them. My branches swayed in the gentle wind of the Spirit which seemed to emanate from His awesome presence. I could hardly contain myself this time as my leaves and branches seemed to bow down lower and lower as He drew closer and closer to me.

I couldn't explain it, but one thing I did know was that whenever He came around love would flow through my leaves and branches as a gentle wind blew upon me. It reminded me of the feelings I had before I became bitter when all the trees on the mountain would cry out in praise to their Creator. I had heard them singing out to Him since then, but I could not feel anything but a deadness within me.

As He drew nearer, again He approached the rock which rested nearby and He kneeled down and prayed. This time He lifted up His eyes toward Heaven and said: "FATHER I THANK YOU THAT YOUR SPIRIT IS UPON ME BECAUSE YOU HAVE ANNOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD TIDING TO THE MEEK; AND THAT YOU HAVE SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND TO OPEN THE PRISONS OF THOSE WHO ARE BOUND. TO APPOINT UNTO THEM THAT MOURN IN ZION, TO GIVE THEM BEAUTY FOR ASHES, THE OIL OF JOY FOR MOURNING, THE GARMENT OF PRAISE FOR THE SPIRIT OF HEAVINESS, THAT THEY MAY BE CALLED---TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS---THE PLANTING OF THE LORD, THAT YOU MAY BE GLORIFIED."

I was astonished at the words He had spoken. I had never heard such words before. I then wondered what this all meant, and why He was praying in such a manner. He was still calling God His Father and this time He claimed that God's Spirit was upon Him.

This time He even said something about "trees." He called them, "TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS." "Could He have been talking about me?" I questioned. Could God be that interested in trees? I then remembered that my father told me once that trees were symbolic of man, and that wood represented man in the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. I surmised that He must have been talking about men and not trees like me and my family.

A few days passed and I saw Him climbing the mountain again. The same feelings I had experienced before were rising within me, yet this time I was filled with mixed emotions. If He was the Son of God, why was He coming to pray beneath my shade? After all, I am just a lowly tree who had many of my fruit bearing branches broken off.

I was one of the worst sinners of all the trees on the mountain. My deep rooted bitterness had made me look ugly and my trunk and branches had become gnarled and dry. My branches didn't produce fruit anymore, and even the ground around me had become hard and dry. I had refused to let the water which fell from heaven enter my roots which God had planted in the ground beneath me.

"Why did He choose me to pray under?" I questioned. "The tree standing in the spot next to me provided much more shade and was much stronger and more beautiful than I," I thought. I had rejected the wisdom of my father and had become bitter against all the people who had hurt me, cut on me and broken off my branches. Now after seeing this man I

was feeling sorry for the way I had treated others and how I had rejected the counsel of my father.

I hoped He didn't know what a bitter tree I had become, but I had a hard time trying to disguise the mixed emotions I was feeling. Somehow I knew all He had to do was look at the condition I was in and see that I was good for nothing anymore except to be cut up and placed in the fire to be burned. I was just as dead as many others who had been cut down and burned in the fire. Yes, I still had a few leaves left on me, but they two were slowly drying up like the rest of me.

Nevertheless, I was somewhat thrilled and excited to see Him again. This time the man who called God His father brought twelve men with Him. I had seen Him with these men on several occasions at the foot of the mountain. I heard Him call them His Disciples. I didn't understand what a Disciple was, but I was hoping I would soon find out.

As they came closer, I forgot about all the negative emotions and feelings of failure and sorrow I was experiencing. My heart was racing again and the feelings of love and peace were returning. "Maybe I could become a Disciple one day?" I hoped. That way I could follow Him wherever He went and I could always feel that peace and joy I experienced whenever He was near. Then I remembered I was just a dying tree who was stuck in the ground I was standing on.

The man who called God His Father and the Disciples all knelt down and prayed under my branches for a while. Then they all listened as He taught them many things about His Father. They finished with a prayer then they all travelled back down the mountain to the valley below.

I still wondered why He would stop under such an ugly tree like me when there were so many other trees on the mountain who were much more beautiful and vibrant than I

was. "Why me?" I questioned. Sometimes I would dream that He would look at me and see me as a beautiful tree, full of life and grace. However, those were only fleeting moments because shame and discouragement would always rise up within me. Especially, after He had left and gone back down the mountain.

I would remember all the scars on my torso, the broken branches and the withering leaves. My roots had all but dried up. When He wasn't there, all I felt was the same deadness I had experienced since I had become bitter and rejected the counsel of my father.

Even though I loved being in His presence, I felt so unworthy to have Him rest under my branches. I would look again and again at my scars and hoped He couldn't see them. I couldn't help but feel ashamed at times when He was near. He brought so many different emotions to the surface in me.

Sometimes I would watch Him for hours as He preached and prayed for people in the valley below. Thousands of people would come to hear Him teach about God and the Prophets of Old. I thought to myself: "They must surely feel that same love and peace that I feel when I am in His presence."

Sometimes I could hear the sound of His voice echoing from the valley below telling the people about the Love of God. Once I heard Him say that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Begotten Son, and whoever believed in Him would receive Everlasting Life. I really didn't understand much of what He was talking about though.

I am sure that if I could have heard everything He said I might have understood more of what He was saying at that time. You know I even began wondering back then if God could really be His Father. But, I restrained myself from getting too

radical about God. After all, all I had to do was look at myself and see I was not worthy to be someone God could love.

CHAPTER 3

THE GREAT FEAST

One day there was a great feast in the city below. People were singing and dancing in the streets. Many people came from miles around to attend the annual Feast. I couldn't wait to see this strange, mysterious and compassionate man again, the one who continued to proclaim that GOD WAS HIS FATHER. It was rumored that He had a natural father like I had. His natural father's name was Joseph, and His mother was named Mary. Yet, He continued to call God his Father. Could He possibly have TWO fathers? I had never heard of anyone having two fathers. He was so strange and different than anyone I had ever seen! Maybe He could have two fathers, but I could not understand how that would be possible.

I was hoping against hope that in the morning He would again come and pray to his Father God beside the rock beneath my branches. "What did I just say," I thought! I called GOD His father.

I noticed on several occasions as I observed Him in the valley below that religious men would try to set traps for Him. The talk among the other trees was that the religious leaders in the city below did not like Him saying that God was His Father. One time he even called the religious leaders snakes and whited sepulchers. Somehow He was always able to escape from the traps they set for Him.

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