

- ***Genesis 2:8,9*** Fall is definitely within the top four of my favorite seasons, but truly it is right near the top because some of my favorite things begin to take place during the fall. Cooler weather sets in, sweater vests and other comfortable clothes make their way into the wardrobe, and (usually) I would be excited for the start of football season with basketball being right around the corner. What I also love about the fall season is the visual reminder that it is upon us. The trees begin to change colors and the beautiful red, oranges, and yellow leaves begin to make their appearance. This year, I first saw this change while driving through Virginia and being up in Maryland while we were visiting my sister and brother-in-law. Since then the leaves have continued to change and even fall to the ground, so we know the fall season is in full swing.
- Yet, I would like to suggest that trees play a much more vital role than simply being pretty to look at during the fall season. As the largest plants in the world, trees are vital to providing oxygen to us on this planet. They also provide resources such as paper and wood for heat. They are also pretty handy when it comes to providing some shade on a hot day. However, the importance of trees goes even far beyond these benefits, and they actually play an important role in our faiths believe it or not. Trees are a major theme throughout Scripture, and I would like to take a few minutes this morning to highlight three specific trees found within the Bible that play a vital role in God's plan for us as humanity.

I. The Tree Of Life

- A. We just read of this tree a few moments ago from **Genesis 2:8,9**, and I'll simply point out the importance of this tree to Adam & Eve in the beginning. Best I can tell, this tree was their life source for existence within the Garden of Eden. I say this based upon what happened after some events took place surrounding another tree in the Garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Following the rebellion of mankind, God recognizes the need to cut off their access to the tree of life that was found in the middle of the garden. *"The Lord God said, "Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, **he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever.**" So the Lord God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life."* (**Genesis 3:22-24**) With this expulsion from the Garden of Eden, death became a staple of human existence.
- B. However, this is not the last time we read of the tree of life. Just as we found this tree at the very beginning of the Bible, so we will find it again at the very end of the Bible in **Revelation 22:1-5**. This vision that John sees of the New Heaven and New Earth and the New Jerusalem is described in such beautiful terms beginning in **Revelation 21**, but here in **Revelation 22** we *"Then he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the city's main street. **The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.**"* This great tree makes its great reappearance at the end of the story, but that certainly begs the question...how did it come to be accessible to mankind again? How did we go from being expelled from its presence, no longer having access, and to now having access that allows us to reign with God forever? This answer will be seen in our next tree.

II. The Oak Of Moreh

- A. The way for mankind's access being restored to the tree of life is through the man Abraham and his descendants. We are introduced to this man at the end of **Genesis 11**, but the real story of Abraham begins in **Genesis 12:1-3** as God makes three promises to Abraham concerning his descendants inheriting a great land, becoming a great people, and his seed through his descendants being a blessing to all of the people of the earth. Abraham simply needed to obey the command of God to get up and go, and he did that very thing. He got up and set off on his journey which eventually led him to the site of Shechem as is recorded in

Genesis 12:6,7. *"Abram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. (At that time the Canaanites were in the land.) The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him."* The seemingly obscure mentioning of this being at the oak of Moreh might seem strange to us, but it will make much more sense when we realize this is not the only time this tree is mentioned.

- B. **Deuteronomy 11:26-32** also makes mention of this tree(s) in the context of God fulfilling His promises to the descendants of Abraham. They were already a great people after having flourished so greatly in Egypt, and now God was preparing to make good on His promise of giving them a great land. Notice what Moses says that takes us back to that text in **Genesis 12:6.** *"Aren't these mountains across the Jordan, beyond the western road in the land of the Canaanites, who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, near the oaks of Moreh? For you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you possess it and settle in it, be careful to follow all the statutes and ordinances I set before you today."* What does the mentioned of this tree(s) signify to us? It screams out the faithfulness of God to His promises! He promised Abraham that this land (signified by this tree) would be given to his great nation of descendants, and God shows this is exactly what would take place through this message being preached by Moses. God is doing exactly as he said He would do, and somehow tress continually find themselves in the middle of God's fulfilled promises with the greatest promise made to Abraham also involving a tree...

III. The Cross Of Christ

- A. Going back to **Genesis 3**, we find another promise of God that was made in the midst of the curses brought upon humanity by the rebellion of Adam & Eve. **Genesis 3:15** states, *"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."* This is the first mention of the Gospel story being at play within Scripture, and it all ties back to what happened with a tree. Yet, we also know from a good knowledge of Scripture that the Gospel also centered around a tree with that tree being our third tree this morning...the cross of Jesus.
- B. It is through this tree that the evil one was crushed by the atoning death of the Son of God for the sins of mankind. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* (**1 Peter 2:24,25**) This text screams echoes of what is written in **Isaiah 53**, and it does so in order to show the incredible love and faithfulness of God that fills us with that hope of being in His presence for eternity with access to the tree of life once more through the death that His Son suffered for us on a tree.

Whether or to we have considering it before, we must now recognize that tress play a pivotal role in the story of God and mankind. He graciously granted Adam & Eve with access in the Garden, but sin caused that to change. Yet, it was a tree that served as a reminder of God's incredible faithfulness to Abraham through the fulfilling of the promise for his descendants to become great and inherit a great land. That final promise of his seed blessing all of mankind was also fulfilled through the tree that was the cross of Christ. It was through that atoning sacrifice that we now have hope of an eternity with God and access to the tree for eternity. Next time we think upon the beauty of the trees, may we remember that **the true beauty of trees isn't in their leaves, but it is in the promises & hope they represent in God's Word.**