

LESSONS FROM THE OLIVE TREE

Judges 9:8 The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

According to the parable of Jotham, the trees first decided to make the olive tree their king. Clearly, there was something very special about the olive tree. Why was it the obvious choice for all the trees to unanimously accept as their king? Samuel was mistaken when he assumed that Eliab, due to his impressive height, must be the obvious choice for king of Israel. “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (I Samue 16:7). However, unlike Samuel, it appears the trees did not select the olive tree as king because of its appearance; the olive tree is not an impressive looking tree at all. The trunk of an olive tree is often thick and gnarled, with a rugged and twisted texture. It can be short and squat or tall and slender, depending on the age and growing conditions of the tree. Olive tree branches often have a sprawling and irregular growth pattern. The branches may also have a twisted or contorted shape.

Now, had the olive tree been a vain and arrogant tree, it would not have hesitated to be king over the trees. The olive tree, however, is a humble and God-fearing tree. This is what it replied. “But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?” (Judges 9:9). *Here is the first lesson we can learn from the olive tree: it knew that its fatness was of God and intended for the glory of God.* Next time you buy some olive oil from the supermarket remember the message of the olive tree. Did you know that the olive tree was the first to declare to Noah and all creatures on the Ark that the waters had abated, and that it was safe to disembark? What a privilege was reserved for the olive tree – Noah’s dove plucked off a leaf and brought it back to Noah. It was the olive tree that welcomed the human and animal families back to the new world cleansed off all sin. “And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth” (Genesis 8:11). We cannot stop there, however. The olive tree always played a close role in the Temple in Israel since the days of Moses.

Exodus 27:20 And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always.

In this sense, the olive oil pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. Jesus' light is never dimmed or extinguished – he always burns illuminating his identity and salvation and exposing the lies of the Devil. “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The olive tree had no desire to abandon its blessed privilege towards God and humans. It wants to see its oil brought into the Temple and into the Holy Place. How can one compare such an honor with becoming the king of the trees? Which other tree's fruit or oil was brought into the Holy Place? Someone once said: if God calls you to be a Christian, do not stoop to become a king. People of God, do you know your blessing? Are you aware of the oil of fatness that Jesus has bestowed upon you for his name and his Kingdom's sake? Then refuse to be king of this world! Leave that job to the bramble tree. The bramble tree is basically a thorny bush. Just have a look at a bramble bush! It has no leaves or fruit, just thorns. Yet, it quickly accepts the offer of becoming a king and issues a threat.

***Judges 9:15** And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.*

It doesn't have leaves so what shadow is it talking about? Anyone foolish enough to approach it will be scratched and injured. The bramble boasts of gifts it does not have, but the olive has gifts it refuses to corrupt. Let the other trees follow the bramble, but we will follow only the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen! The olive tree teaches us to know who has given us gifts and to be faithful. No wonder David compared himself to an olive tree in the house of God. “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever” (Psalm 52:8). The olive tree can live for thousands of years. The olive trees in Vouves, Greece, are estimated to be about 4000 years old. Year in and year out they produce fruit and olive oil to bless God and humans. Consider some of the benefits of olive oil: good, healthy fats, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory properties, protects against heart disease, fights Alzheimer's, reduces type 2 diabetes and can alleviate rheumatoid arthritis. It continues to bless humanity. The olive tree did not want others to serve it, but to serve others, reminiscent of the character of the Lord Jesus.

***Phil 2:5** Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

***Phil 2:6** Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

***Phil 2:7** But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

Israel wanted a king although God was their king. The olive tree wanted only God as king. Its as if the Lord blessed the olive tree with longevity because of its faithfulness. In heaven, there are two witnesses whose names we are not told. However, they, too, are symbolized by olive trees. “Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?” (Zechariah 4:11) and “Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:14). Once again, these two faithful witnesses, who are compared to olive trees, are mentioned in the Book of Revelation. “These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth” (Revelation 11:4). Once again, what an honor for the olive tree! Faithful ministers of God are compared to olive trees. Finally, a message about the blessing of olive trees cannot be complete without mentioning the Garden of Gethsemane. The name itself means an “oil press” because this place was filled with olive trees and there was a press where the olives were crushed and its oil collected.

***Matthew 26:36** Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*

***Matthew 26:37** And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.*

It was not a coincidence that our Lord Jesus prayed his greatest prayer for us in the company of olive trees. They were the only witnesses and company he had that night. It is fitting that the olive trees, faithful ministers of the Temple, were witnesses of the Lord’s final battle for our salvation. For thousands of years, the olive trees gave their oil for lighting the lamps which helped ministers and other God-fearers read the scriptures and pray at night. At Gethsemane, olives were crushed to release the blessed oil. Similarly, the Lord was crushed spiritually at Gethsemane to release salvation for the world. Consider how many years olives have been witnesses to loud and intense prayers – in the Temple and now in Gethsemane! No wonder, the olive tree said, “Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?” (Judges 9:9). Fatness in Hebrew is *dešen* and means “abundance, blessing”. Let us learn from the olive tree! It may not be the most impressive tree in appearance, but it knew where its blessings came from, and it determined to never abandon its service to God and humans. No wonder there are few trees that live as long as the olive tree and still produce fruit. Lord Jesus, grant that we may be as olive trees!