

THE MAJOR THEME OF “THE REAL DEAL”

For those in Christ; the theme of Revelation speaks to three truths:

1. The Christian’s need for authenticity; that is, we **MUST** be the real deal.
2. The Christian’s need for faithfulness and endurance; that is, *we must remain* the real deal.
3. The Christian’s need for patience; that is, *we must end strong* as the real deal.

In fact, it’s really all about the third one; but you can’t finish strong unless you perform the first two. It’s not the first time God conveyed this theme to His people. Twenty-seven hundred years ago, prophets were sharing the same message with Israel. They were about to face their own version of the apocalypse. –And history tells us how that ended.

Jeremiah was one of those voices. What if the people had just listened to the warnings and the teaching! In his prophecy, Jeremiah sets up the scenario for the individual who is **cursed**, and the one who is **blessed**. We’ll cover his prophecy in more detail this evening, but for now, we’re focusing, on just one line: Jeremiah 17:8. The blessed...

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. (Jeremiah 17:8)

In our day, we could envision this tree as the spiritual life of a church community, or as an individual life, the imagery fits either way. If we read the whole passage we’d see that a life, planted by the water is a good thing. A life putting down Godly roots is a good thing. Through the chapter, Jeremiah fires the mind’s eye to see the tree growing to a majestic stature and bearing fruit. That’s what healthy trees do; and that is what healthy spiritual lives do as well.

But the truth is, even a tree that seems healthy can end up like the one we’re looking at on the screen. Using a rough formula, our tree here is between 50 to 80 years old. That tree had been standing and thriving for a long time. Twenty years ago, we wouldn’t consider it falling; even now there’s good foliage on it; but it *has* fallen just the same.

The tree is a good analogy for church institutions, isn’t it? Mega-churches or country churches; they shot up and branched out, you’d never imagine they’d ever collapse, but they have. The same thing happens in the lives of individuals; we thought they were spiritual giants, and then it seems almost overnight, one final storm, one last challenge, and there they are. (*tree on screen*)

THE ANALOGY: TREE, EARTH, AND WATER

Let’s put on our arborist hats for a minute. This looks like a healthy tree, so where’s the problem? -The problem is at the roots!

As we apply Jeremiah’s imagery to our reflection, there are **three main elements** to the illustration; there’s the **tree**, the **earth**, and the **water**. Let’s apply a little symbolism to each.

The earth-

The earth is the timeless aspect of reality. Real truth is timeless; God’s truth is timeless. From a human perspective, the ground is timeless. One hundred and forty-five years ago, inspired by a Methodist revival meeting, a group of people moved earth to set up, what we now call, “the old sanctuary.” They lived their lives maintaining the church, they passed on, but the ground remains, then another generation, and another, and another... came and passed on, but the ground remains. If the Lord tarries, that will be true of us also!

In the important things; truth is timeless; we are just as fallen in our natures as Adam was. Humanity, in our fallen state, thirsts just as much for vengeance as Abel’s time; is just as hungry for perversion as the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, and is every bit as violent and territorial as Babylon of old.

On the other hand, there are those who hear God’s call as clearly as Abraham. There are stories of transformation today, as dramatic as the ancient apostle Paul. In all the core ways; humanity is still the same as it always was; just better cell phones! ...**Truth is timeless.**

The water-

Water is used in various ways in Scripture. In Jeremiah's imagery, it's the familiar idea of a life resource. But let's go a little more Greek in our imagery. The Greeks saw water as the fluidity of time. It is the ever-changing aspect of reality. Its currents are a parade of changing circumstances; changing human systems; and changing mentalities. –And especially in Jeremiah, the every changing human heart. (*Look in the stream, see that bubble? That's the latest craze on the internet. Oh, it just popped, I guess we don't feel that way anymore.*)

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Rivers change course, as a matter of fact, geologists can tell the age of a river by the type of course it follows. And as we can see from our picture, the waters erode the earth. The earth is still timeless, it is still earth, it just collects somewhere else downstream.

Especially in a postmodern society, how well this fits. The currents of human thinking erode the truth, but the truth is still the truth. ...And then there's...

The tree-

Trees are amazing things, aren't they? There's so much going on *above* the surface that we see. That's where life is open for display. We see the tree branch out and blossom. We see its fruit. But in a healthy tree, there is an equal amount going on *under* the surface. The roots have a number of critical jobs:

The roots provide the basic nourishment. For all the impressive biochemistry going on above the surface, no tree can survive without what the tree absorbs from the timeless earth. The same is true of the spiritual life; no Christian or church can survive spiritually without roots absorbing the timeless truths.

In fact, a **good root system does more than absorb the earth, it protects it.** That's why trees and grass are planted on hillsides; it keeps the soil from being eroded! The roots **grasp the soil.** It's the same in a spiritual life, isn't it? If our root system is healthy, we **not only absorb the timeless truths, we grasp them, we hold on to them, we live** in them, and as long as there are good roots, the **fickleness of the culture** or the **deceitful tendencies of the human heart** can't erode the truth.

Spiritual roots absorb truth and they **grasp the reality of it**, and **that is what keeps us from falling.** It works that way for the **individual** and just as much for the **collective lives** of the church.

But here's the thing: Christians have a tendency to miss the mark on what it really means to, **"go back to our roots."**

We have a great illustration at Canaan right now. We're all excited because of the beautiful job being done in restoring the old sanctuary. We've been dreaming about special events in using it. However, if our idea is to glorify the past, or glorify the people of the past, we're in serious trouble.

If the true Christians who founded the church saw us turning the focus on them, they'd be mortified! They'd be like the angel in **Revelation 19:10**

John confesses, **'At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus."**

If our idea of **"going back to our roots"** involves glorifying traditions or people of the past, then we are not deepening roots, we are root-bound, and any gardener knows how *that* ends.

However, if our true heart is not to *glorify*, but to **remember** the testimony of the past for the purpose of honoring what they have honored, namely Christ, that is an entirely different thing. Then we're talking:

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

I'll be honest, I'm grateful for the effort into restoring the old sanctuary, but *I'm also uneasy about it as well*. – Because even though the Revelation 19:10, and Hebrews 12:1 lead to totally different ends, they look very much alike on the surface.

If the restoration has any other focus but to honor the Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, our root situation is more like this tree. (*Second tree still standing, but has the roots exposed on the river bank.*) This is a magnificent tree. It has survived a long time. The tree looks healthy, but because of the root situation, it's already dead, it just doesn't know it yet. It's just a matter of time. Just let a little more of the "truth" erode, and it will fall under its own weight.

So what exactly are the roots?

The roots are our *grasp of God's Word*, and the root is our *experience* with the true God. This is a timeless truth was as true to the ancient Hebrew as it is for the modern evangelical. 3000 years ago, Psalm 34:8 said, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

In a nutshell; the root is **Christ Himself**. Romans 10:9 says:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

"I, **Jesus**, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." (Rev. 22:16)

ROOT SYSTEMS

Christ is the only root that gives life. But to balance out this whole analogy, let me add this: In the Christian life, there are **two types of root systems that are destined to fall**, even though things look good above the surface.

There are the shallow roots. They go in the right direction, but the going was a little too hard, so they just don't go far enough, and when they are put to the test, their grasp of the timeless truth is not deep enough. They fall.

There are the partial roots; perhaps the ground was easier to penetrate in one area than another, so they concentrated in one area instead of in a balanced all-around way. They do fine until the winds blow from that weak direction and they fall like a door hinge.

BOTTOM LINE

Here's the bottom line:

If the roots are **anything but Christ**; the spiritual life will fall. (*Christ-like; loosely based on; religious-looking, won't do.*)

If the roots are **shallow**; the Christian life will not stand.

If the roots are **unbalanced**, the Christian life will eventually fall.

Sunday morning is little more than fertilizing the soil; if this is the basic sum of your **spiritual rooting**; Scripture says that this tree is you. (*On screen*)

The roots need to be into our homes and personal lives as well. But even in our church community; this analogy allows me to share the urgency of why, as pastor, I focus in the direction that I do:

The reason the sermons tend to be content heavy, and the evening sermon is designed for everyone to articulate their faith; and why we have small groups, and encourage next steps every week is for the one reason; to stimulate a proper root system.

This is the theme that Revelation is pushing us toward; it's all about *authenticity*, faithful *endurance*, and most of all... it's all about *ending strong, despite the storms and waters*. None of that is possible without the proper root, and the proper root system.

We've covered the analogy pretty thoroughly, so let's reflect on a question as we go into offering and our next step cards. The question is simply this:

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE; YOUR HEART, YOUR MINDSET, YOUR DAILY PRACTICES LOOK LIKE THIS TREE? (Tree with roots partially exposed.) OR IS YOURS; IS OUR CHURCH; SOMETHING HEALTHIER?