

SPIRITUAL TREES, Part 2



A couple of weeks ago, a very famous New Zealander died, who was thought of as a tree: Colin 'Pinetree' Meads. So people can be compared to trees.

It has often been noted how Christians are like spiritual trees.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit the marvellous Sequoia and Redwood trees of California, and there were a couple of new things I noticed there that I thought provided worthwhile sermon material.

Psalm 1 is the classic comparison of Christians to trees.

Psalm 1:1-3 ¹“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ²but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on His law day and night. ³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.”

We saw in part 1 that a tree needs four things to grow: water, light, warmth and soil.

Another thing some trees need to grow is fire! That doesn't apply to all trees, but I was surprised to see in California that sequoias depend on fire for their growth and reproduction!

Here's a quote from a newspaper we got when we entered the Sequoia National Park.

Fire: A Natural Change

“Years ago, we tried to banish fire from the landscape, believing it was destructive. In sequoia groves, that meant putting out lightning-caused fires that naturally start as often as every 5 to 15 years. As time passed, we saw unanticipated consequences from this practice. Fire suppression blocked important natural processes, which led to big problems.

First: sequoias were not reproducing. We learned that fires create the conditions that sequoias need to regenerate; Fires leave behind a seedbed fertilized with ash, and they open the forest canopy, which allows sunlight to reach the seedlings.

Second: the amount of dead wood and dense growth of small white-fir trees increased tremendously. In the past, frequent natural fires burned these away. Now, after fire's long absence, these serve as fuels, feeding bigger, hotter blazes that are more dangerous for people, plants and wildlife. For over 40 years at these parks, we have studied fire and its effects on the land. To protect human safety and benefit giant sequoia trees, we now work with fire to restore the benefits it brings.

We still put out fires that threaten life and property, but when and where it's appropriate, we ignite prescribed fires or allow lightning fires to spread naturally,

reducing fuels and improving resource conditions. Strong evidence shows we are succeeding.

Why is this important? The national parks exist to conserve resources “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” We once thought that aggressive fire suppression met this goal. A more complete understanding of fire tells us that excluding this important natural agent of change only hurts what we are trying to protect.”



Spiritually speaking, fire can be good for us too.

1 Peter 1:6-7 ⁶“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

In fact, it is necessary and essential for Christians to go through fiery trials.

Acts 14:22 (NIV) “strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many **hardships** to enter the kingdom of God’ they said.”

(KJV) “We must through many **tribulations** enter the kingdom of God.”

1 Peter 4:12-13 ¹²“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.”

What looks like a trial for the sequoia is in reality the process they need for future growth. Fire is like pruning in that it seems dangerous and unhelpful, but in fact it causes future growth.

The second largest tree in the world is the General Grant Tree. If you look at the side of it, there is a huge scar or wound caused by fire. Many trees have these, and many Christians do too.

Fire is helpful to the sequoias because it causes the cones to release the seeds, it composts the soil with ash, it opens holes in the forest canopy so sunlight reaches the young seedlings, and it gets rid of old trees before insects and disease overtake them.

But surely it isn't good for the trees themselves? Surely it damages them and kills them?



No. Amazingly, the sequoias have extremely thick and spongy bark, which can be 2 feet thick, that stands up to fires. In fact, the bark contains tannic acid, a fire retardant used in fire extinguishers!



But if there is an opening in the bark, or the fire gets too close to the roots, it can get inside or underneath the bark. Then it will burn the tree from the inside out, although it still can't get through the fire resistant bark with its tannins. So the result is that the trunk becomes hollow as the fire eats the centre of the tree.

1 Corinthians 3:13 "their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work."

We are tested by the fire of trials, and also Satan is always attacking us, trying to burn us up with bad attitudes. Becoming offended, or being offensive, or harbouring hatred, anger or wrong desire is like a slow-burning fire

that can consume us from the inside.

Proverbs 6:27 "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?"

The other interesting thing I discovered about sequoias is their root system.



The sequoia redwood trees, located in California, are some of the biggest trees in the world. The **General Sherman** is, in fact, noted as THE largest known living single stem tree on earth. It is 275 feet tall, 25 feet in diameter, and is approximately 2,500 years old.

You would think that something that huge must have an incredible root system that goes down deep in order to stand that tall! But that is not the case at all. The sequoia redwood trees have a unique root system that is a marvel, compared to their mammoth size.

Their roots are relatively shallow. There is no tap root to anchor them deep into the earth. The roots actually only go down 6 to 12 feet, and yet, these trees rarely fall over. They withstand strong winds, earthquakes, fires, storms and prolonged flooding. How can something up to 500 tons,

reaching over 350 feet in height, and live for many centuries, remain standing with roots only going down about 10 feet?

The interesting thing about the redwood trees is that their root system is intertwined with the other redwood trees, literally holding each other up. The trees grow very close together and are dependent on each other for nutrients, as well. Only redwoods have the strength and ability to support other redwoods. (The sequoia is a type of redwood.)

So, beneath the surface of these humongous, tall, statuesque trees are roots like an army of men who have their arms interlocked, standing and supporting each other. They are preventing the adversaries of life from knocking each other down. They are also making sure there are plenty of nutrients for growth to continue.

Redwoods reach their incredible height because they grow very close to each other. They are always together with other redwoods, supported by a vast interlocking root platform. Sometimes they grow so close to each other, they merge at the base into one tree. The roots fuse together as well. This way they can withstand high winds and raging floods.

The lessons for Christians are obvious. The need to support each other in community. Those who try to be independent Christians are likely to be destroyed by Satan, the roaring lion who seeks whom he may devour.

When God looks down from heaven at His Church, maybe He sees us as a beautiful forest of magnificent trees. There's hardly a more pleasant sight I can think of, and God sees the righteous person as a tree beside a river (Psalm 1).

Hebrews 11 records the stories of many faithful followers of God, and is called "the Faith chapter," but maybe it could be called "the Forest chapter." It describes a forest of towering sequoias who all faced the fiery trials of life, but responded with faith in God. Faith carries us through the forest fires of life.

So those are some lessons from the sequoias of California. Let's conclude with a final scripture on this theme.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 ⁷ "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him. ⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

LET'S STAND TALL AND STRONG AS GOD'S FOREST OF GREAT TOWERING SPIRITUAL SEQUOIAS!

