

“God Has a ‘Green Thumb’?”—Ezekiel 17:22-24

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God Has a ‘Green Thumb’?”, is Ezekiel 17:22-24. *Thus says the Lord GOD: “I Myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I Myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Many people find satisfaction and enjoyment in gardening. Is it the mystery of taking a seed which looks dead, placing it into decayed substance called dirt and experiencing beautiful new growth? Is it the feeling of bringing forth new life and beauty or fruit while nurturing a plant from start to finish? Is it getting to be outside enjoying the beauty of God’s creation, swatting the mosquitoes, shooing gnats and flies, and . . . I mean . . . experiencing the

warmth of the sunshine and the “warm” North Dakota “breeze?” Maybe it’s another way in which we can experience life and the hope of new growth in the footsteps of our father, Adam, whom *the LORD God took . . . and put . . . in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.* (cf. Genesis 2:15)

I remember my mother telling me that grandma had a “green thumb.” As a little child I looked at my grandma’s thumb. It’s was the same color as mine! She told me it was her way of saying that grandma had a “knack” for growing things. It seemed like all she had to do was stick her thumb in the dirt and things would grow. People still refer to those who have a “knack” for growing things as having a “green thumb.” But where did this phrase originate?

According to James Underwood Crockett, “having a green thumb” comes from the fact that algae growing on the outside of earthenware pots will stain a person’s thumb (and fingers) if he or she handles enough pots. Hence, a person who is always working with flower pots has a green thumb. (WalterReeves.com The Georgia Gardener)

In the text before us it appears that God has a “green thumb” too! In this prophecy God talks about His actions of humbling His people in order to make them “green” with new life for all nations, utilizing the picture of replanting a *sprig from the lofty top of the cedar tree*. In its immediate historical context it refers King Nebuchadnezzar, who took God’s people into exile in Babylon in

597 BC and set up one of King David's family members named Zedekiah to rule Judah under Nebuchadnezzar's authority. However, Zedekiah tried to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar with the help of Egypt only to watch Nebuchadnezzar destroy the nation of Judah. But how did they get into Babylonian slavery in the first place?

Have you ever heard someone comment about someone else: "Man! That guy really needs to be cut down to size!"? It refers to his needing to be humbled because he is arrogant and belittles others. Proverbs 16:18 says it this way: *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* God's chosen people were humbled by the LORD because in their arrogance they refused to follow Him and live in obedience to His Word. For years He called them through His servants to repent of their sins and trust in Him alone, only to watch them continue in their rebellious ways. To break their sinful rebellion and pride He brought about the loss of everything near and dear to them in the Promised Land in the hopes that they would come to their senses, repent and believe in His redemption and Lordship **alone!**

When we become prideful and stubborn in our sinful, rebellious ways God will "cut us down to size" with His Law in order to bring us to repentance and new life in His grace. The LORD brings rebellious sinners such as you and I to recognize our sinful arrogance, pride, disobedience and rebellion by humbling

us. Through confession and absolution He then “plants” us by His grace so we produce the new growth of faith and obedience by the power of His Holy Spirit! This is the picture of verse 24 of our text: ***I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD . . . I will do it.*** In Deuteronomy 32:39 Yahweh says: *See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand.*

Redemption is always God’s work from beginning to end!

Zedekiah discovered this truth. He figured that he could bring salvation for God’s people by aligning himself with Egypt to deliver them out of captivity to Babylon. However, since their deportation was a result of their disobedience to Yahweh in His disciplining action, redemption must also come from Him, not from anyone else. That’s why He says in verse 22 of our text: ***I Myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I Myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. Salvation is always Yahweh's work, not man’s!*** **And when He saves, everyone shall know that He is the LORD! It is based upon His grace, not our works!**

God has a “green thumb?” Yep! However, it’s not just that Yahweh has a “knack” for making things grow. Rather, He takes what is dead and gives it

life!! It's all about new growth through His grace! The planting described in our text is a picture of God's bringing all people into new life with Him through His promised Messiah, Jesus. The sprig which God breaks off from the *topmost* of the cedar tree refers to two things:

- ① In the context He promises to keep a remnant of the people of Judah through whom His Messiah would eventually come. However, even their very existence serves . . .
- ② . . . God "planting" Jesus through their family line Who humbled Himself to bring new life for all people in the forgiveness of sins! Jesus was "planted" *on the mountain height of Israel*. He bore *branches* and produced *fruit* through His perfect life, death and resurrection. He is *a noble cedar* under which *every kind of bird*—that is, people of every nation—can find rest and restoration of relationship with *the LORD!* (cf. Verses 23-24a)

As a result of God's "green thumb"—that is, His cutting and planting activity in our lives—all people can come into this new relationship with Him! Jesus carried over this same picture given by God through Ezekiel as He described His church now and eternally in Mark 4:31-32 → *The kingdom of God . . . is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger*

than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. Yahweh's deliverance, which came through the small remnant of the tribe of Judah in the Person and Work of Jesus, the Christ, brings eternal salvation and restoration for all people who trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness!!

Yes . . . God still has a "green thumb." He continually works in your life with the "cutting" edge of His law to make you recognize when you stray in disobedience to His Word. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit "plants" faith and produces brand new growth of forgiveness and obedience to His Word in you. Through God's "green thumb" action in Jesus Christ we have the privilege of being new creations in His grace as we serve and obey Him every day!! Amen.

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

but his delight is in the law of the Lord,

and on His law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water

that yields its fruit in its season,

and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

(Psalm 1:1-3)