



I AM like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints. (Psalm 52:8-9)

There are two trees mentioned in the narrative of the Garden at Eden. One symbolized eternal life, and the other a gradual death in separation from God. Trees are often presented as a type of the Church, too. Normally, there are trees that provide fruit and other benefits to men. Even the oak, though fruitless, provides an overarching shade during the hot months of summer. The pine tree provides fuel for heating and chemicals for use in paints. There are palm trees of the desert whose character is likened to that of the well-rooted Christian. They are tall, erect, and have a root system much larger than their visible trunks in order to search deep for the Water of Life, and broad leaves which reach as near to heaven as their nature of growth will allow.

The elegant and tall Cedars of Lebanon reach their limbs heavenward in reverence to the Almighty God, and their timbers were used to construct Solomon's Temple, but these also can represent false pride and arrogance – *11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. 12 For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: 13 And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan,* (Isaiah 2:11-13) In many references concerning trees in Scripture they are used to personify the properties, either good or bad, of man.

At the fall of Lucifer, the Trees of Lebanon are said to rejoice: *Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us.* (Isaiah 14:8)

But I have chosen to focus on only two trees today – the Olive Tree and the Mustard Plant - to make a distinction between the faithful Church of the Smyrna sort and

those of the Laodicean nature. Most churches today can be clearly relegated to one or the other.

The Mustard Plant Church

A herbal plant typical of Middles Eastern cultivation that grow to a maximum height of about eight feet; but while living in the Middle East for more than five years, I never saw a mustard plant taller than five feet. Unlike a tree, the mustard plant is comprised of fibrous stalks (much like okra). It is used as a condiment and some of its so-called medicinal uses are controversial. It possesses no nutritional value and lacks any trace of vitamins of any type. No human could survive on the mustard plant.

The Mustard plant is mentioned several times in Scripture. In the most prominent case, the plant is made reference to by our Lord as a 'Tree.' This is a parable revealing the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. (Matt 13:31-32)

Just prior to this parable, our Lord told the parable of the wheat and tares growing together. In its earthly state the Church is never pure. It is always composed of faithful Christians and the remainder of hypocrites who are there for social, business, and political reasons. The mustard seed is, indeed, tiny; but when this particular seed of the parable is planted, it becomes something abnormal to its nature – a Tree instead of a bush.

Though the seed represents, in my view, the Gospel, its growth is bigger than the natural growth should indicate – it becomes a TREE – a tree so large that *the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches*. The fibrous stalks of a mustard plant would not normally support bird nest; moreover, birds usually like to nest higher above the predator domain than the height of a mustard plant. But this mustard plant is big enough to afford their lodging. What does this mean?

Wealth and prestige always attract men with greedy and selfish objectives. When the Church becomes wealthy and renowned in the community, guess what – the businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and city leaders will seek to join in the cozy comfort of that church for personal gain. This is somewhat like the Church at Laodicea: *14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.* (Rev 3:14-18)

This is an example of a church grown larger than its love of service to God. Its branches are filled with the birds of the air which are referred to earlier in this same chap 13 of Matthew as demons. They eat the fruit, and enjoy the benefits, but contribute NOTHING." In fact, they take away the spiritual direction of the church by constantly insisting on moderating the preaching of the word and even denying its power.

Here is how Christ referred to the birds in the first parable of the same chapter: *"Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up."* (Matt 13:3-4) A bit later, when the disciples asked him

the meaning of the parable, our Lord referred to the birds in this way: *"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side."* (Matt 13:19)

In my opinion, the modern church typifies this church that has grown larger than it serves its purpose. The central purpose of such churches is to gain popularity, worldly approval and garner financial wealth to its leaders. This worldly church has not changed the world by its witness but has been changed by the world to satisfy the world's approbation.

The Olive Tree Church:

This church may be very much like that Church of Smyrna described in the Book of Revelations: *"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."* (Rev 2:8-10) The life of this church is directed OUTWARD to reach others, and not INWARD to satisfy self in pride and wealth.

The qualities of the Olive Tree represent many which should typify the Church of Christ. The Olive Tree is lush and green, though not tall and majestic. It is green in all seasons which is not typical of most fruit-bearing trees. Its fruit is abundant and sweet. It benefits natural life as well as human desire. The fruit of the Church should also be sweet to the taste and nutritious to the soul. Its sweet influence should benefit all life in its environment even if those are not part of its members.

The oil of the Olive Tree is used to fuel lamps for those who would otherwise sit in darkness. The purpose of the Oil of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ is to open our eyes from spiritual darkness to the greater Light of the Holy Scriptures. The Olive oil is also used as a condiment for salads, and a means of cooking. It gives its all for the benefit of others.

The Olive Tree also has problems associated with the birds of the air. These come and ruin the fruit of the Olive tree. They eat only a small part of each Olive fruit and go to the next unless the workers in the orchard guard against these intruders. The same is true of the true Church. Whenever demonic powers attempt to attack the fruit of the Church, the church leaders have the high duty to guard against error and lack of moral discipline in order to preserve the doctrine and purpose of the Church in a pure form.

All of us who belong to churches belong to one or the other. We will find few that are only part one, or the other. Once the Church permits the predators of the fruit to come and live in its branches, the result will always be doctrinal and moral compromise.

Which of these two churches best describes YOUR church – Mustard Plant, or Olive Tree?