

March 27

## The Mystery of the Cross

### Part One: The Lofty Cedar

***“Thus says the Lord God, ‘I shall also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I shall pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and shall plant it on a high and lofty mountain.’” (Ezek. 17:22)***

A neighbor about 6 houses southeast of the church, ironically on “Pine Tree Road,” has a tree of another type that I covet. It is a cedar – the classic kind of cedar depicted on the Lebanese flag. It is beautifully shaped, fragrant, stately, has the enduring characteristics of cedar wood, and is, of course, “evergreen.” It always looks beautiful. I’ve never seen any other tree like it.

Several years ago, I asked the owner if I could have a pinecone from the tree. It turns out the house was sublet, but the person renting said it would be fine. Then I spoke with a couple of our agricultural experts who said cedar seeds were difficult to germinate and had to be prepared properly. I tried to make that seed germinate. It never did.

Why the obsession? Because cedar trees played such a prominent role in the sacred life of Israel, I thought a cedar would be a meaningful and beautiful addition to the Biblical botanical walkway on the grounds of the church. And I suppose the obsession is strengthened by driving past the cedar every day.

In antiquity, the cedar was used for most expensive homes. Kings David and Solomon made their homes out of cedar from Lebanon. And in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek retort, God would say to David, ***“Did I speak a word to the tribes of Israel saying... ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar’”*** (II Sam. 7:7)? Recall that God had instructed the Levites to build a sacred tent (implying mobility) called the “tabernacle.” And after David had built his own house out of cedar, he felt a bit guilty and thought God should get the same. But when You are Creator and Owner of all things, You really don’t need to impress people with trinkets of Your wealth. God was content with a tent – albeit a very nice tent. Later, Solomon would construct the temple, and he chose to use cedar for the Holy of Holies.

The top of my neighbor’s cedar has an anomaly. From the top down about three feet, the tree is “green-less,” with no sign of life there, just dried and dead branches. One of our long-time members, living across the street from the cedar, shares this back story: the tree was planted by a Cornell professor. Apparently, some 35 or 40 years ago, the tree was struck by lightning, killing the top.

On Good Friday, in a lightning strike of judgment, God the Father revealed both grace and any future judgment for those who miss seeing the true “goodness” in Good Friday. Apart from Christ and faith in Him, there is only lifeless judgment. Judgment awaits those who fail to notice and believe in this vicarious strike which killed the top. But the rest of the tree thrives, evergreen, filled with life.

The prophet Ezekiel has an appropriate parallel passage (continuing the passage above): ***“On the high mountain of Israel I shall plant it, that it may bring forth bows and bear fruit, and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.”*** (Ezk. 17:23)

**Prayer:** *Lord God Almighty, thank You that Christ suffered the strike of judgment, shielding us, so that we might have life and forgiveness. May we rest secure in Christ our Shield, and Lofty Cedar. Amen.*