

## The Fig Tree

*written by Bob Lepine*

Dear Friends,

We have a fig tree in our back yard. It's huge. It has taken over the northwest corner of our lot, with a variety of twisty branches that offer essentially no canopy except for the very young person. Meanwhile, the root structure for the tree protrudes from the ground, extending in all directions from the trunk of the tree.

Our fig tree was not always as big as it is now. I'm afraid it's my fault the tree has grown so large.

Many years ago, I decided on a whim that thought we should remove the whole overgrown mess from the back of our yard. When an office building was constructed behind our home, the previous owners planted a half dozen pine trees along the back of the lot to serve as a natural barrier between our property and the office parking lot. The trees sit in front of the privacy fence that was erected by our office building neighbors.

The fig tree stands at the end of the line of the fast growing fir trees along our fence line. And in my mind, the tree stood out. It didn't belong. So one day, armed with a chain saw, I buzzed that tree down to a stump. All the branches were dragged to the curb. All the green was gone. I figured the fig was finished.

It wasn't.

I don't remember how long it was before innocent looking shoots began to appear around the stump. But over the next few summers, what grew in the northwest corner of our back yard was a bigger, branchier, wilder, more expansive fig tree than the one I cut down. If my goal was to get rid of the tree, my project was a total failure. I would have been better off leaving the little fig alone. Cutting it down turned it into a big fig tree.

Years before the Babylonian army marched into Jerusalem and cut the nation of Judah to the ground, the prophet Isaiah announced that one day, a shoot would come forth from the stump of Jesse and a branch would come from its roots that would bear fruit. At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, the people of Judah lived in peace in their homeland. Their kings ruled from the same throne in Jerusalem that King David had once occupied. They saw their city as a fortress that was, because of its location on the top of Mt. Zion, impenetrable.

And for centuries, that had been the case. The Assyrians had tried to conquer Judah, and they were turned back. Other nations had sought to overthrow the people, to no avail. In fact, the people of Judah had come to think that no one could take them down. Their God – Yahweh – would keep them safe from harm, no matter how much they neglected Him or went their own way.

But in 597 BC, the Babylonian army laid siege to the city, and cut it down. They killed the weak, the elderly, the children – anyone who couldn't serve as a slave in Babylon was put to

death. The rest of the people of Judah were taken captive back to the capital city of Babylon, where they became the slaves of the Babylonians.

For all intents and purposes, the reign of King David had ended. Jesse's family tree – the tree the Jews believed would one day produce the promised Messiah had been leveled. Reduced to a stump.

But God had plans for the stump of Jesse. And like the fig tree in our yard, the cutting down of the people of Judah was not the end of their tribe. Sixty years later, when the armies of the Medes and the Persians eventually conquered the Babylonians, the new King Darius allowed the children of the Jewish captives living in Babylon to return to their ancestral home in Jerusalem. And over the next 600 years, the stump of Jesse began to sprout, until eventually, a young woman from the tribe of Judah gave birth to a first born son and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn.

What has grown from the stump of Jesse is a family tree so much bigger and more glorious than Isaiah could have ever imagined. The shoot from the stump today stands, as Isaiah said He would, as a signal for the peoples. He is the One of whom all nations inquire. And his resting place, as Isaiah has promised us, will be glorious (Isaiah 11:10).

This is the good news we are preparing our hearts even now to celebrate in a few weeks, as we come together to declare that from the stump everyone assumed was dead, "joy to the world, the Lord is come." And His resting place is indeed glorious!

Soli Deo Gloria!  
Pastor Bob

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