

# THE TENDER PLANT

## A SERMON

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“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant.” Isaiah 53:2

I TAKE a threefold view of this plant; first, as here described, *a tender plant*; secondly, *its transition from the present to another world*; and third, *its plantation in ultimate glory, and the state of things thereby brought about*.

I notice then, first, *the plant as here described*; “He shall grow up before him as a tender plant.” I scarcely need say that it is a self-evident truth that the person here pointed to, called a plant, is the Lord Jesus Christ. There are three reasons I will assign why he is called a tender plant. First, tender means weakly; a weakly plant; that he was put into such a position as to be the subject of weakness; not weakness his own, but weakness belonging to others. And the idea stands thus, here is a plant that has no corruption or possibility of corruption or decay, planted in the worst possible position, and, therefore, has to endure weakness by reason of the inclement elements with which it is surrounded, and the wintry skies under which it grows up to perfection, and brings in all the blessedness that we shall have in the last part of our discourse to refer to. Let us enter definitely into this matter. In the first place, then, he was born, for the Scriptures are clear upon it, he was born under a broken law, under a violated law. There was a law that had been transgressed; there was a law that had been trampled underfoot. Now, Adam was not placed under a broken law, so that Adam had not to make other people’s faults good; he had nothing to do for other people; he was placed under a law that had never been transgressed. Here is a mighty difference here between the first and the last Adam. Jesus Christ was born under a violated law, and that was a very inclement position in which to be placed, with all the curse of that law frowning upon him; and he was a debtor to do the whole law. I scarcely need say, that the whole human race is held for eternal judgment by the law of God. Where there are nations that have not the letter of the law, they are, nevertheless, held by the spirit of the law. I need scarcely say that all men are held for judgment by the law of God, and that law cannot fail. Now, Jesus Christ was born under this law, that he might fulfil the law; so that, when you and I see this, that this law holds us fast for judgment, we may also see that by what the Lord Jesus Christ has done we are entirely free from that law, everlastingly free from it; and so it is said, he is the end of the law for righteousness; so that he came righteously to the end of the law, and we by faith in him come righteously to the end of the law. So that here he grew up unto a perfection of righteousness, and his righteousness is perfect; and in receiving this we become thus set free from the law. Now, Christ then had to make good that law, and he did make it good. He was planted, shall I say, amidst the solitudes, and amidst the

thunders and lightnings of Sinai; this is where he was planted; so that he was a tender plant, weakly, not from what he was in himself, but from the position in which he was; he had to endure thus our weakness.

Second, he was born, also, shall I say, heir to our sins. Such was the way in which the Lord had ordered matters, that Christ was born just where our sins were. Our sins were under the law; our sins were according to the law; and Christ was born just where our sins were; he was born heir to our sins. Not one of our sins was left to us. God the Father, in imputing sin to Christ, took every one of the sins of the people away from the people, and left not a fault, or blemish, or wrinkle, or spot, or any such thing. And the sins belonged to Christ; he was born heir to those sins, and he must either atone for them, he must either bring those sins to a termination, an entire termination, or else those sins will hold him fast until he has done so. And there is not anything in all the Bible clearer than that this heavenly plant grew up in this department also to perfection and has brought sin to an end. When we see this, we come into the presence of God by this righteousness and by this perfection which the dear Savior has reached. But let me come down here a little too personal feeling upon this matter. Our own sin, inherent corruption that we have derived from Adam, has withered us; and when God lays home to the conscience of a sinner that man's sin, how it withers him! it withers his hopes; it withers his comforts. He was just now a flourishing tree, a Pharisee, spreading himself like a green bay tree, and he thought himself prospering and happy; but when this conviction sets in, it withers a poor sinner, and if you ask that man what he is now, he says, I am a mere brand; that is all I am now. I am burnt with sin; I am burnt with God's wrath; I am a mere brand; I am withered; I am corrupted; and I have no more hope from anything I can do than a mere brand in the fire can pluck itself out of the fire, turn itself into a tree, and become that which shall bear fruit; so utterly helpless. And so a poor sinner thus stands before God; and then, when the Lord comes in and rebukes Satan, sets the sinner free, "is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" such an one immediately comes to this, if not in words, yet in substance he comes to the following contrastive conclusion, Here, he says, my personal sins have withered me, spoiled me, I could not come before God and stand before one of my sins; and yet here is a Person, the Plant of great renown, of God's right hand planting, the Son of man, he came with the sins of all the people; and yet the sins of all the people, numerous as they were, could not wither him, could not blast one of his leaves, for his leaf remained green; much less injure any of the fruit, could not wither him. Mysterious tree of life! mysterious Person! My personal sins, if I had but one sin before God, that one sin would wither me, subject me to eternal privation, to everlasting perdition. But here is a Plant, born heir to the sins of sinners, and when he comes into these inclement regions, all put together could not wither him; he was as fresh and holy when he laid down his life as he was when he began the work; he was as righteous when he drew his last breath as he was when he drew his first, he was as free from fault when he bowed his head at Calvary, as he was when he was born that holy thing, and was of the Holy Ghost. Here, then, is the plant, the tender plant, the weakly plant, born under the law, heir to our sins; so, there is an end to condemnation, an end to sin, and here we may meet God with unutterable pleasure, yea, with everlasting pleasure. And when you pray that are brought to see your need of this weakly, this tender plant, "when you pray say, Our Father."

Then, third, he was born in the territories of the enemy, all making it every way bad for him. No sooner was he born than it became manifest that the devil recognized something in his territories that he had never recognized before. Here is a mysterious child born; angels come down from

heaven with their anthems concerning him; the shepherds come and see, and worship, and return rejoicing. Here is something mysterious. Here is that old high-doctrine Simeon making out that this child is set for the eternal salvation of Jew and Gentile; and here is that old high-doctrine Anna, eighty-four years old, I wish she had died before, she is come into the temple, and she is speaking of him to all that are waiting for redemption in Israel. Why, it is a mysterious child.

Satan goes to work, stirs up Herod, and stirs up all hell and all earth to come and destroy this child. But ah, what vain attempt was this! If I can but cut this plant down before it comes to perfection, then I shall starve the people to eternity; then I can lead them to a land where they shall indeed be hungry, where they shall indeed look up and curse their God, if I can but destroy this plant. But no; this plant is watched over by the great God, and this mysterious plant itself also is God as well as man, and therefore safe everywhere. And so, from time to time, the adversary did all that he could to cut this plant down, but he could not do it at last, could not cut it down at last. Satan might perhaps boast, and the people might boast of their murderous deed of having cut this plant down; but no, "No man takes my life from me." It was the sword of justice that cut it down; it was the sword of justice that thus met it. So that this plant was safe. Here, then, is this wonderful Person, planted under the law, that we may undergo a transition from the law to the gospel, for without this plantation of this mediatorial plant under the law there would be no gospel for us to be transplanted to. He was planted there, where our sins were, that we might be transplanted from the first Adam ground to that gospel ground where no sin is; he was planted in the enemy's territory that we may become planted in the land of the gospel at God's right hand, and bear fruit to God's glory. I view this, then, to be one of the meanings here; and I am sure it is a meaning that endears the Eternal Three. Who can but love the blessed Spirit for making such a revelation as this, this way of escape? Who can but love the blest Redeemer for thus occupying this position, that we thereby might be brought out, and occupy just that which is the reverse, and that contrasts gloriously with that state of sorrow in which he was planted? And does it not endear God the Father? It makes God and godliness altogether lovely.

Then, second, his being a tender plant means not only that he endured thus the weakness of others, but it means tenderness of conscience. Jesus Christ was born of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, and he never could be hardened in the slightest degree against God; he had a conscience with a perfection of tenderness before God, so that he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Oh, none can tell, I cannot tell you, how deeply the Savior felt the solemn, shall I say the infinite and eternal importance? of the honor of God's law and of the gospel. His conscience was always alive; it was natural to him to be so. He was fairer than the children of men. There is not one instance of his being defective here. Of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. The consequence is, that by that tenderness of conscience before God he brings about that state of things described in the word of God. Let us hear his own account of it. "I have set the Lord always before me." Mark that. No Christian can say that, not with truth; but Jesus Christ did say it. And in my younger days, when I came to a scripture of that kind, I tried to do as I thought the Psalmist did, supposing it to be the language of David instead of David's Lord; but I dare not stand before you this morning and say that I have always set the Lord before me; I dare not say so. But I can rejoice that Jesus did; and the Lord does not accept me by my tenderness of heart or conscience, though they are blessings for us to possess, but he accepts us by this perfection of the fear of God that was found in Jesus. "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved." Nothing but sin can move me; I commit no sin, I do no sin, I have no sin of

my own. It was sin that moved Adam from God's presence; it was sin that moved the Jews; it is sin that will move the sinner at the last great day from the presence of his glory, and will send him away with devils to dwell; but I do no sin, therefore I shall not be moved. "Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also shall rest in hope: for you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption; you will show me the path of life; in your presence is fulness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Here is the tender plant. Let us come before God and confess our hard heartedness; let us come before God, and confess that we like sheep have gone astray, turned everyone to his own way; and then let our plea be that which is put before us in this same beautiful chapter: "The Lord, has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Oh, he felt deeply, then, the essential importance, as I have lately said, of abiding both by the law and by the gospel. A tender plant. Tenderness in relation, then, to God's honor; never deviating from the truth.

Third, he is called a tender plant also because he is the representation or the representative, the demonstration, the pledge, the full assurance of God's tenderness to man; he is the representative of the Most High God. He is a tender plant, as the representative, the pledge, the assurance, of the tenderness, of the mercy, of the Most High God. Let us hear David give us a word upon this. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Here comes the tenderness of which Christ is the representative, the pledge, the assurance, the full assurance. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your iniquities", does it kindly, "and who heals all your diseases", in and by Christ Jesus, "who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies." And the Savior brings forth the same feature of things when he says, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I will deal kindly with you. You have been trying to make yourselves holy, and make yourselves righteous, and make yourselves good; you will never do it, you will never do it. Israel followed after the law of righteousness, but they never attained to it; but the poor Gentiles, whose eyes were opened, and brought to believe in me, in my ability and my suitability, have attained unto righteousness. Why, the Jews, with all their doings, with the labors of many years, could not attain to righteousness; and the poor thief on the cross attained in a few minutes, by precious faith in Christ and prayer to him, what the Jews never could attain. "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls." Do not let us lose sight of one thing here; let us cleave to the fact that he that has rightly seen the Savior has seen the Father. If Christ be meek and lowly in heart, this is nothing else but expressive of the love, and tenderness, and pity, and compassion, and kindness of God the Father towards us. Oh, I am sure of it, as one of your hymns very nicely says,

"He listens to their broken sighs."

I know he does; I am sure he does. He is the pledge, then, of the tenderness of the Most High. Why, said one, "Your gentleness has made me great;" it is the gentleness that has done it. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory; and in his name shall the Gentiles trust." See, then, this plant of great renown; will it not be renowned to eternity for having grown up unto perfection, freeing us from the law of sin and death, and transplanting us into the land of life, of liberty, and of plenty? Will he not be renowned forever by the tenderness of his conscience, by his setting the Lord always before him, and hereby becoming a way by which we poor hard-hearted mortals may have boldness of access

before God by what Jesus has done? "Will he not ever be renowned as the pledge, the assurance, of the tenderness, the tender mercies of the Most High?"

There is something in this I should like very much to live in every day; something in which I should like to die. Oh! I do like that beautiful representation in the 5th chapter of Revelation, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda has prevailed to open the book. And I beheld", what? "in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb." John did not see a lion. No, John, he is a lion for you; he will tear to pieces that person that would injure you; he that touches you touches the apple of his eye; he is a lion for you, but he is a lamb to you; he will deal out terrible judgments to defend you, and be a wall of fire round about you; but with you he will heal very kindly and very gently, and this gentleness shall make you great. So, John saw: he rejoiced to see there was the Lion, because he needed that for his defense; and he rejoiced to see there was the Lamb, because he needed that to give him familiarity with the blessed God, to bring him into sweet sociality and fellowship with Infinite Majesty. So, then, our God knows how, and well I might say he knows how, to be, shall I say social? with such poor creatures as we are; for if he knew how to take our nature, and for a Divine person to become a complex person, if he knew how to do this, I am sure all the rest will follow. Here, then, is the tender plant; first, enduring our weakness, taking them all away, our sins; secondly, tenderness of conscience before God. And I should like to see a little more of this, especially in relation to God's truth. There are some people think I am bigoted. The Lord is my witness that I have not the slightest unkind feeling towards any minister, duty-faith or free-will minister, under the whole heaven; but, as a matter of conscience with me, I am brought to feel, personally and deeply, that I am saved entirely by the grace of God, and that I never should have had the spirit of grace and supplication if he had not first given it to me. When he first met with me, I was dead in trespasses and sins; but because God was rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved me then, and on no other ground, he had mercy upon me. And bless the Lord! he has had mercy upon me since, on no other ground, and will have mercy upon me in the future. And I have felt, for the last thirty years, that I could at any time, grace enabling me to be faithful to my conscience, I could lose my life, nay, I could lose a thousand mortal lives, if I had them, rather than I could give up one of these blessed truths, or suffer, knowingly, anything to be put in the place thereof. I can truly say it is not a matter of bigotry or personal feeling, any further than my soul's salvation is concerned, and the salvation of others, and the honor of God; and if my conscience keep me very scrupulous here, let men call be bigoted. The Lord is the judge, he knows what my heart is and what my conscience is, and if I deal severely sometimes, it is in order that I might take forth the precious from the vile more thoroughly. We must not consult with flesh and blood, we must be faithful, and we must root up, and throw down, and destroy, as well as build and plant. See, then, this tender plant, as I observed, I think, last Lord's-day morning, as our substitute first, and then he becomes our pattern generally. So, I say, then, he is not only a plant, because he was planted in our place, a tender plant, because of his tenderness of conscience before God, but that he is also, as I have said, the pledge, the assurance of the Lord's gentleness with us. The Lord, enlighten our minds to see more of this Jesus Christ, and to see more of the various characters of our God in Christ Jesus. You have never rightly seen the Father if you have not rightly seen Christ; and you must not, for though there is a personal distinction between the Father and the Savior, there is no personal separation, you must not impute a something to the Father that the Son does not possess. The Savior says, "You believe in God, believe also in me." There never was a kindly feeling, and never will be, in Jesus Christ, that did not originate with God. Where does Christ's manhood derive all its compassion from? Divinity: divinity is the fountain; and the

manhood, shall I say? is the way in which that fountain flows forth: so that all the compassion and kindness shown in Jesus Christ came from God, it originated in Deity. With you, the eternal God, is this fountain of life; and in your light shall we see light. Christ did not derive his compassion somewhere else, and so make himself something more merciful than God himself; no, my hearer, he is the image of God. All he had he derived from God. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Perhaps I have not made myself understood now as I could wish, but my object has been to show up these three parts; first, that Jesus Christ was planted under the law, where all our sins and the curse were, that we thereby may be transplanted from the first Adam to the last Adam, from the law to the gospel, from death to life, and from this old sin-blasted world into a world where sin never enters. The second point I have tried to show is that Jesus Christ is a tender plant, because his conscience was tender to perfection, and that all his people are brought to partake, more or less, of that tenderness of conscience. Third, that the Lord Jesus Christ thus, in his tenderness, is the representative of the pity and compassion of the blessed God, who "remembers our frame, that we are dust. As a father pities his children," and none but parents know what that is. It is so very easy, when there are no sympathies in the mind, to say, Now, you should do this. I dare say. There is that prodigal son of yours coming, I would go and give him a good thrashing. No; says the father, I will not; I will go and meet him. I will forget all his faults and take him in doors. I will deal with him, says the father, just as I like. And the elder brother could not deal as the father did; if he had, he would not have done as he did. "This your son," I won't come. Ah, you will know better by-and-by. Your little ones will grow up, and you will know what a father's feelings are; so that none but an earthly parent can understand that scripture rightly, that "as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him." We may well pray to our God. And so the dear Savior says, in another place, "If you, being evil" you are subject to passion and impulse, and sometimes, perhaps, go too far over discipline on the one hand, or under discipline on the other; but "if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven", who shall say how much more? "how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Now here is *the transition of this plant*: it is to be cut down. And who will say, who would undertake to say that Job has not by the Holy Spirit a reference to this very circumstance? While man, when he is cut down by death, he is gone; not so with the Savior; he lives by dying, as the poet says,

"He conquered when he fell."

And who will say that Job's description of the cutting down and resurrection of a tree does not apply first to Christ, and then to regeneration? "There is hope," said Job, in his 14th chapter, "of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease." And so Christ was cut down, and he rose again; and this branch, the tender branch, did not cease. Oh, how true! Now notice "the tender branch thereof shall not cease."

Now, I ask this assembly this morning, was Jesus Christ as tender and compassionate with his disciples after his resurrection as he was before his death? You know he was. He came to them with the same gospel, he came to them with the same peace, he came to them with the same kindness. Instead of his being less kind, I was going to say he was more kind. What could be more kind, what more tender, than those beautiful words, "Go to my disciples, and tell them, I ascend

to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God"? That is tenderness. So, has his tenderness ceased yet? No. Is he not the same now that he ever was? Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. But we will follow out Job. Job says, "Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground." Well, what do you make of this? I need not explain it, I should think; you can understand it fast enough. "Though the root thereof wax old in the earth." What was the root from which Christ sprang? The tribe of Judah. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Therefore it is that the descendants of Judah constituted the genealogical root from which Christ came; and that root waxed old in the earth, and that stock died in the ground; so that when Christ came, the priesthood was dead, the royalty was also dead; so that he himself was a root out of a dry ground, and consequently had no earthly royalty, earthly form, or earthly comeliness, or earthly beauty, that men should desire him; and they could not see the spiritual form, or the spiritual comeliness, or the spiritual beauty; and because he had no earthly form of royalty, no earthly form of comeliness, and because he had no earthly glory, then men, not seeing the spiritual, therefore he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; but then it was that he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. That men did not understand. And thus, then, the root, the genealogical root, waxed old in the earth, where it died and vanished away; and the stock died in the ground, and there it lies dead to the present day. Yet here is a tree, "through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant." Now go back to the 49th of Genesis; "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall." So, Jesus Christ was not dry, there was water at his root; holiness, and righteousness, and divinity, and God's love, and God's counsel; and through his having these things at the roots he rose again. But man, having nothing at his roots but the fire of God's wrath, man cannot rise again; when man is taken away, he is no more until the end of time shall come; that man shall not reappear on the earth until the resurrection day. Fire is at your root; there is a fire at the root of your mortal lives here. But at Jesus' root there was the water of life, and he has indeed budded and brought forth boughs like a plant. Such is the mysterious person, Jesus Christ.

I have not done yet. One more word, and then I must close by saying only about one-third of what I have seen, tasted, felt, handled, realized, and been captivated by in these things. It is one thing for me to realize these things in my own soul; it is another thing to be able to set them forth. Now let us have one more scripture descriptive of this plant in its resurrection state to close with. Ezekiel 17th: here this plant appears again. We see him as the tender plant; we see him in the transition; we see him in the genealogical root, the root waxed old in the earth, and the stock dead in the ground, but we see him live; 17th of Ezekiel, there we have him in his resurrection. "I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar," the Jewish nation, the high cedar; the highest branch, the royal house of David; "and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one," we know who that tender one is; "and I will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent." "An high mountain;" I like that; a mountain too high for sin, or Satan, or the world, or tribulation to reach. There was a great deal of tribulation under the feet of Peter, James, and John, when they were on the mount of transfiguration. Though that mountain, literally speaking, might not have been very high, yet the state was very high; they were brought up into high enjoyment, and said, "It is good for us to be here." Now this plant is to be planted "upon a high mountain and eminent." What is that but Christ, King in Zion? What is that but Christ the Priest upon his throne? What is that but the exaltation of the Son of God? "In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it." And is it not said, "They shall come to the height of Zion"? and what is the height of Zion but, in

the first place, Christ's mediatorial perfection? What is the height of Zion, in the next place, but that eternal glory that awaits every one that is brought to receive the truth in the love thereof? And then sinners are compared to fowls of the air, to fowl of every wing, from the little tomtit to the majestic eagle; "under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." Thus, speaks the Lord, and so it is fulfilled, I say, and so it is fulfilled. Is it not a truth? Some of us have been dwelling spiritually in the branches of this tree of life for many years. I have never yet met with a branch belonging to it that I do not like. But when you slip a few branches of nightshade among the leaves of the tree of life and want to persuade me that those black-looking berries are grapes, then, thank you, I do not choose to lodge with you, no; I know the difference; I can tell you whether it is free-grace fruit or not in a minute. I lived upon free-will blackberries many years ago, and thought they were grapes; then I lived upon duty-faith wild grapes and thought that was right; but now I am brought to live among the branches, the various truths of the gospel. And where else should we live but there? The church of old lived in the same place; their united voice was, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

May the Lord favor us more and more so to do, for his name's sake.