

Introduction:

1. It was 2,000 years ago, in the time of Jesus. A few seeds fell to the earth from a date palm.
  - a. Surely those seeds long ago decayed, turning to dust. We might think so, but not these seeds.
  - b. They were found in a most unusual place—a place where almost nothing grows today.
2. This is the story of the Methuselah Tree. It is a true story and one that has powerful Bible lessons.

The Lesson:

**I. The story of the Methuselah Tree, its seed, its setting, and its success.**

- A. The story of the seed is one that is truly remarkable.
  1. From *National Geographic News*, June 12, 2008 (byline, Ann Menard).
    - a. The Methuselah Tree is growing from a 2,000-year-old seed. It is a 4-foot-tall ancestor of the modern date palm, is being grown at a protected laboratory in Jerusalem.
    - b. A few seeds were found in 1963 and planted in 2005. From one came this tree.
  2. From *Reuters News Service*, (byline, Ari Rabinovitch).
    - a. Israeli researchers who grew a sapling from a date seed found at the ancient fortress Masada said the seed was about 2,000 years old and may help restore a species of biblical trees. Carbon dating confirmed that the seed—named Methuselah after the oldest person in the Bible—was the oldest ever to germinate.
    - b. The seed came from the Judean date palm, a species that once flourished in the Jordan River Valley and has been extinct for centuries. It was discovered at Masada, a winter palace overlooking the Dead Sea built by King Herod in the first century BC.
- B. The story of the setting where it was found is also remarkable—Masada.
  1. The fortress Masada was built high above the Dead Sea by King Herod the Great. It was a virtually impregnable fortress. While Herod never used the fortress, the Jews who revolted against the Romans in 67 AD eventually used Masada as their last outpost. In the final siege of Masada by the Romans, sometime after 70 AD, more than 900 Jews died on that mountaintop fortress. They took their own lives rather than die by Roman hands.
  2. The seeds were found in storage rooms on Masada, and appear to have been stockpiled for the Jews fleeing from the Romans. They were under mounds of debris. Masada had its own watering system and plants could have easily been grown on the summit.
  3. The Dead Sea region was once famous for its full-size, succulent dates. The fruits were renowned for their sweetness and for their use in treating various ailments. Judean dates represented Israel's biggest export business 2,000 years ago. But after centuries of wars, invasions, and drought, date cultivation ended, and the region's vast date forests disappeared completely (*Science Now Daily News, from discovermagazine.com*).
- C. The story of success in growing the little tree is likewise noteworthy.
  1. While the seeds were found in 1963 in an archaeological dig, they lay on a shelf in Tel-Aviv for more than 40 years. (They had already laid in Masada for 2,000 years.) Project leader Sarah Sallon of the Hadassah Medical Organization in Jerusalem says her team tried to germinate three date palm seeds in 2005. Only one sprouted.
  2. Prior to the Methuselah Tree the oldest seed known to germinate was from a 1,300 year old Chinese lotus. From the hull of the germinated Methuselah seed, researchers did radiocarbon dating that placed the seed at the approximate time that Jesus was on earth.
- D. Isn't this a remarkable story? There is another story about a seed that is also remarkable, but it never makes the news. This seed is also 2,000 years old. And it is sprouting everyday!

**II. The story of the gospel seed.**

- A. The story about the sower and the seed is an old story, a familiar story, Luke 8:4-8, 11-15.
  1. Jesus says, "The seed is the word of God." It is planted with the hope of harvest.
  2. The soil is the hearts of men—differing kinds of hearts. Some receive it, and some don't.
  3. The only heart that the Lord commends is that heart that hears the word of God and keeps it. He calls that a "noble and good heart." It is a heart that bears fruit for God.
  4. In this parable, Jesus calls upon all men to examine their hearts. Which heart are you?
    - a. The wayside heart is the one that hears but never responds to the seed.

- b. The heart represented by the rocky soil is the one that believes for awhile, and then falls away when time of temptation comes.
  - c. The thorny ground is the heart that believes, but the seed is choked by the cares of the world. It bears no fruit. Many churches are filled with people who have this heart.
  - d. The good ground is that heart that hears the word of God and keeps it with patience. This is not only a fruit-bearing heart, it is a heart that keeps on keeping on! It endures.
  - e. Jesus asks each of us to examine our hearts. You are one of these hearts; so am I.
- B. Our lesson, however, isn't just about our hearts. It is about the seed. Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God," [Luke 8:11](#). It is an old seed. It is not a new seed.
1. When that seed was planted in noble and good hearts 2,000 years ago, what did it produce? We need only to look to the book of Acts for an answer.
    - a. On Pentecost, [Acts 2:14, 36-41, 47](#). When this word was planted in noble hearts, it changed their lives. This seed is powerful, [Hebrews 4:12](#). It made believers out of those honest hearts who heard the word, [Romans 10:17](#). It caused these good hearts to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. By the end of that day—the Day of Pentecost, it produced saved people.
    - b. What will the same seed produce 2,000 years later—today? Will it be something different than in the first century? Did that date palm seed produce something different?
    - c. The same seed, properly cultivated and nourished in good soil always produces the same thing. You do not plant beans and get corn; you do not plant an acorn from an oak and get an orange tree. Seed always produces after its kind, [Genesis 1:11](#).
  2. The word of God properly planted, cultivated and nourished always produces the same thing. A search of the New Testament reveals that it produces saved people, people who enjoyed the remission of sins, people who were called Christians, people who were made members of the Lord's church. Some examples:
    - a. The people who obeyed the word on Pentecost were saved as a result of hearing the word of God, [Acts 2:41, 47](#).
    - b. They were added to the church because they heard, believed and obeyed God's word, [Acts 2:47](#). Some translations don't mention "church" in this verse. The saved were added to something; what was it if not the church? [Acts 5:11](#) calls this group of people "the church." [Acts 8:1](#) says it was the church that was persecuted. This is the very church Jesus promised to build in [Matthew 16:18](#). It is remarkable and even shocking to people today when they learn that 2,000 years ago there was only one gospel—one seed; that one seed made all who believed it members of one church!
    - c. That seed produced people who were Christians, [Acts 11:26](#). The teaching of the gospel produces Christians. It does not produce something else. These people were Christians and Christians only. They had never heard of "different kinds of Christians" like people speak of today. They weren't brand X, Y, or Z Christians. They were just Christians. That's all the seed ever produced.
    - d. Sometimes people ask, "Can you trace the New Testament church in a historical line all the way back to the apostles?" I don't have to. All I have to have is the same seed they had back then. The same seed produces the same fruit.
    - e. People may ask, "How can we just be simply Christians in a world that is so confused by the doctrines and commandments of men? The answer is the same. All we need is the same seed the early Christians had—and the soil of good and honest hearts.
- C. Why can't that seed produce the same thing today as it did 2,000 years ago? It can and does.
1. That 2,000 year old date palm seed produced a date palm tree. That's all it could produce; it could never produce anything else. So the gospel produces people who believe and obey the gospel. It produces Christians; it could never produce anything else.
  2. The fact that the date palm seed and the gospel seed are both 2,000 years old does not hinder the production of their respective fruits. God put power and life in that palm seed; the same God put power and life in the gospel seed—not in a corrupted seed—but in the pure seed, the word of God, the gospel of the kingdom.

### Conclusion:

1. Don't worry that the seed is old. It still has power. It is still the only thing that saves.
2. The only issue today is about your heart and mine. Will we receive the pure seed into our hearts?