

Foreword

On the Unseen Wisdom of Palm Trees and Matthew Henry

I GREW UP IN a forest. The Allegheny Forest to be precise. The Allegheny mountains of western Pennsylvania are literally carpeted with trees. Before Drake discovered oil in those mountains, logging was the primary industry in northwestern Pennsylvania. And logging cleared the mountains, leaving them bald. After the oil boom hit, the hills were populated instead with oil derricks, a sort of sparse, small-scale forest—or so the pictures record.

By the time I was born, the forest has recaptured the hills, hiding the derricks and muffling their sound as they pumped thick, black crude oil out of the ground. I spent many years of my boyhood biking on the oil-lease roads that crisscrossed the hills around my home with my friends. I learned about trees there. I learned that in a light rain the trees would keep those dirt roads underneath me dry and rideable. I learned that on hot summer days it would still be cool under the trees. I learned how to climb trees—all kinds of trees—there, and came to know differences in branches and leaves and bark and many things there. I also learned that as tall and majestic as the trees above me were, they were equally intricate and extensive beneath me. As much as trees provided shelter, roots provided a hazard, as a root in the road could spell a spill on one's bike. Knowing roots were a crucial part of knowing a tree.

But today I write this on my patio in southern California with tall palm trees swaying in the Santa Ana breezes. Palm trees do not look like other trees, particularly the ones of my youth. But they are trees after all, so I assumed they were still trees underground. As tall and durable as these

trees are, they must have an extensive system of roots to afford them such stability.

But they do not. They defy my expectations of a tree. The roots of a palm tree are like a fibrous web of tendrils extending from a ball-like bulb in the ground. As roots continue to die and be replaced by new ones, they do not grow to the extent of the trees I had come to know so well as a boy.

But I assumed they did. But thanks to the unique root system they do have, they are able to thrive in arid, windy climates, even while they grow to dizzying heights. There is wisdom unseen in their design. Sometimes things look a lot different when you dig a little bit.

And so I am thankful for the digging Dr. Jong Hun Joo has done to unearth the very unique roots that are the foundation for Matthew Henry. Matthew Henry is best known for his exhaustive, verse-by-verse Bible commentary. It is one of, if not the, most cited biblical commentaries in the English language and it has few peers in terms of expanse and influence. A less well-known fact is that Henry was primarily a pastor and secondarily a biblical scholar. However, what you will learn in this book is how scripture, prayer and worship operated as the trinity of Henry's piety and pastoral care. The Bible was certainly central for Henry, but it was read within the context of prayer, personal and gathered, and he gave instructions for how to pray, and how to worship and how to appropriate the scriptures as an individual, a congregation, and as a family.

These are Henry's roots. His faith was not founded upon exegesis and scripture study. But his exegesis and scripture study was rooted in his passion for the devout life and a living relationship with a living God. Henry was spiritual, even liturgical. This was the ground of his biblical work and the aim of it as well.

Now in this work by Dr. Joo, we have for the first time a careful analysis of the spiritual and liturgical pulse of Matthew Henry's pastoral ministry and piety. Through the careful description and analysis of Henry's life and times, one comes to understand the crucible that formed his beliefs and faith. Further you will learn about the influences on Henry's thought and his convergence and divergence from those influences. But foremost, you will see for the first time a clear exposition of the centrality of worship and prayer in Henry's life. The careful and thoughtful work in unearthing this unknown side of Henry is not only a welcome gift historically; it is a precious gift to the soul. For Dr. Joo's work is not one that ends in theological and historical detail, but honoring the ministry of Henry, promotes the

quality and themes of Henry's insights into private and corporate prayer as resources for today's church. If there is a guide for a church in challenging times, it just might be Matthew Henry.

So delight in this book and its unique foundation in the spiritual and liturgical perspectives of Matthew Henry. Henry, like the palm tree, has such unique roots that it allowed him to negotiate the challenging winds of his days even as his biblical scholarship soared to new heights. Might you find rootedness in the wisdom of Jong Hun Joo's careful recovery of Matthew Henry's pastoral voice. It just might be the understanding you need in your life today.

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