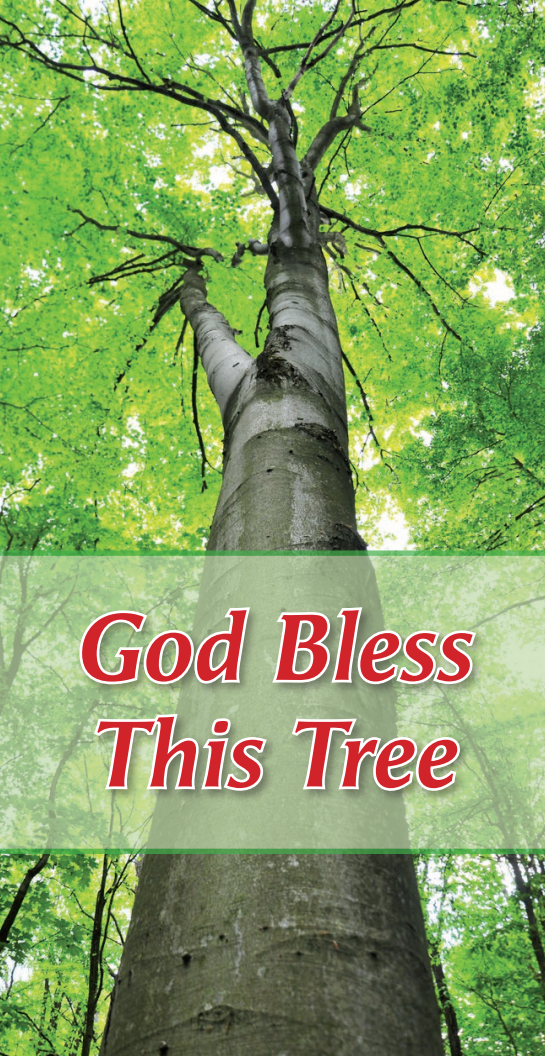


A low-angle photograph of a large tree trunk, looking up towards the sky. The trunk is thick and textured, with some dark spots. The branches spread out at the top, surrounded by a dense canopy of bright green leaves. The sky is visible through the leaves.

***God Bless
This Tree***

There was much unrest in Venezuela during the transition from twenty-three years of dictatorship under Juan Vicente Gómez to the more balanced, but severe, administration of López Contreras. Thus, on February 14, 1936, many people were gathered in Bolívar Square in Caracas, shouting political protests. Suddenly, soldiers stationed at the Yellow House opened fire on the crowd, resulting in many wounded and several dead.

At that moment, a shoeshine boy was in the square, diligently engaged in his work. With the first burst of machine-gun fire, he jumped behind a tree. At that moment, a bullet, which could well have wounded or even killed him, penetrated deep into the trunk.

After the incident, the young man carved these words into the tree's bark with his knife: **God bless this tree.**

That shoeshine boy recognized three important truths. The first was that he was exposed to serious danger. This is also true for every man or woman threatened by the danger of death. Many, upon hearing the shots, did not take cover. Others did not believe they were in danger. This young man, without arguing or protesting, did not hesitate to flee from the danger, but

rather jumped behind the protective tree. So, dear reader, put aside pointless arguments. Recognize your danger and run for refuge behind the tree of Calvary's cross.

Secondly, the young man understood that the tree was wounded instead of him. This is substitution: one suffering to free another. Paul puts it this way, *"the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2.20 NKJV). Peter wrote that Christ, *"bore our sins in His own body on the tree"* (1 Peter 2.24 NKJV). John said, *"We love Him because He first loved us"* (1 John 4.19 NKJV).

Thirdly, the young man was grateful for that tree trunk. No doubt, it was with feeling that he uttered the words, **"God bless this tree."** It is said that gratitude is the mother of all virtues.

The psalmist David wrote, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies"* (Psalm 103.2-4 NKJV).

However, the vast majority of people live indifferent and neglectful of the

Son of God who came to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19.10). They overlook the great reason why Christ had to die on the cross.

There are those who sincerely and devoutly participate in religious rituals and events without ever pausing to contemplate Jesus Christ, the only Substitute, suffering for them on the cross. They have never looked by faith at Calvary and exclaimed with a genuinely grateful heart: **God bless this tree.**

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