

A TALE OF TWO TREES

Genesis 2:16-17, Romans 8:18-25

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The story of creation found in **Genesis 1-2** – tell us that everything God created was good, and God’s final act of creation on the sixth day was to create the crown of His creation, who would love Him and obey Him and rule over His good creation, and that was us. Mankind was created to receive love from God and return that love back to God and to one another. Then we are told that God planted a garden on this earth in a place called Eden, where He put the very first humans to live and to work in a paradise-like setting. The function of the Garden of Eden was to provide a safe environment where everything would be provided for Adam and Eve and for their future children. This garden was not only a protected place for Adam and Eve, but also a holy sacred place as God would come to this garden and walk with them. God walked in the garden because His desire was to have intimate fellowship with the crown of His creation that was made in His image, the image of pure love. **Genesis 1:27, “God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”** Made in God’s image, means we are His children whom He loves in the same way that an earthly father loves his children, provides for his children and wants to spend quality time with them, desiring their love in return.

We are never told how much land this garden occupied on this earth – but the Garden of Eden had definite well-defined boundaries, with the land outside of the garden not as hospitable for humans as was the land inside of the garden. It was God’s will that this hostile place outside of the garden would be tamed as part of Adam’s work. I believe God’s original plan was for Adam to work and take care of what God had started him off with, and then keep expanding that garden area until it covered the entire earth. God set up the Garden of Eden as Adam’s and Eve’s original domain and as their family grew, they were to keep expanding the garden area to meet the needs of their expanding family as well as keep expanding God’s sacred holy place to eventually cover the entire earth with His abounding love. So, Adam’s God given purpose in this garden was not only to maintain it as a beautiful and productive place, but also as a sacred place, much like a pastor tries to keep their place of worship from being defiled by anything that is ungodly or unholy from entering God’s holy sanctuary.

The church is to be a safe sanctuary for God's people to come and fellowship with God and each other – a refuge from the hostile world outside their walls, and then the church's mandate was the same as Adam and Eve's – to expand that Godly sanctuary to cover the entire earth!

God had put a great deal of responsibility on Adam's shoulders to not only work the garden but also protect it and his family from any evil that may slither its way into this garden. Adam's role was not only that of a gardener, but also as a gatekeeper or guardian to prevent anything impure and ungodly from endangering his and his family's relationship with God his Creator, and also prevent anything from defiling or negatively affecting God's good creation. This morning I want us to see how Adam failed in His God given responsibility and what we can learn from his failure. As well, there are similarities between the garden and the church.

We are told in **Genesis 2:9** that along with all of the other trees that God had planted in the garden – there were two very special trees that He had planted in the center of the garden. ***“In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”*** And then, God gives very specific instructions about one of these trees: ***“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’”*** (Genesis 2:16-17). We may wonder why God would plant such a tree in this place of perfection, but I believe the reason was that for love to be true love, it needs to be tried and tested. Unconditional love can only take place when we have the freedom to choose between good and evil, love and hate.

In the beginning God created Adam in His image out of pure, selfless, and perfect love, and God's desire was that in return His created beings would truly love Him and obey Him, much like earthly father's desire their children to love them and obey them. Love by nature then can only be true love if we are given the freedom to choose to love or not to love without force or coercion. We can bring children into this world, but we can't force them to love us, they must choose to love and obey us through free will. So, the greatest heart-ache for any parent is when their child rebels and rejects their love!

God created a beautiful garden so He could pour out His love on Adam and Eve – and all God wanted in return was for them, in thanksgiving to return that love back to Him. So, God placed two important trees in the garden to help Adam and Eve

work out their love relationship towards their heavenly Father. The first tree is the Tree of life, and it was the greatest tree in the garden because eating its fruit would provide eternal life for the eater, and you will notice that God didn't put any restrictions on eating the fruit from this tree, they had free access to eat its fruit anytime they wished, but for some reason they avoided the Tree of Life. I wonder if it was God's hope that Adam and Eve would come to reach out and eat from the Tree of Life and receive the eternal Spirit of God; thereby, being filled with the fruit of the Spirit, the nature of God, as recorded for us in **Galatians 5:22-23**, *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

Today many people are health conscious – getting lots of exercise and watching what they eat. We have often heard people say, *“you are what you eat,”* which is a true statement because whatever we eat is absorbed into our cells and becomes part of us. As we eat, the proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and minerals within our food they play a vital part within us; as they are absorbed, they become part of us. So, the types of foods we eat in our diet can have a positive beneficial effect on our bodies or a negative unhealthy effect on our bodies. This fact is helpful for us to understand what happened in the garden that day when Adam and Eve ate the wrong fruit, the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, plus what could have taken place if they had eaten the correct fruit from the Tree of Life. It was God's intention for them to eat from only the right tree, and if they had done so, I believe they would have never eaten the forbidden fruit. By eating the right fruit from the Tree of Life, it would have been absorbed and become one with them, causing them to be Christ-like and resist the devil when he came slithering into the garden. I believe it was God's intention for Adam and Eve to eat only from the Tree of Life and gain eternal life without ever having to taste evil; however, for some reason, Adam and Eve never reached out to the fruit on the Tree of Life!

God planted a second tree in the garden – right next to the Tree of Life. This second tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was the proving ground of Adam and Eve's love and obedience for their heavenly Father. God planted this second tree in the garden because He wanted them to freely choose to love and obey Him. God was not looking for robots who have no choice; instead, God was looking for lovers, who would freely choose to love, worship and obey Him.

Another test that God allowed into the garden was the serpent – the fallen angel Satan. God had given Adam the specific role to protect the garden against anything that would slither in and disrupt or destroy the unity they had with God and His good creation. So, when Eve encountered the serpent, Adam should have taken immediate offensive action to deal with God’s enemy who came in to deceive, manipulate and destroy the peace and harmony they had with God and His good creation. I also don’t believe that it was God’s intention that Adam nor Eve should have tried to deal with Satan in their own strength but should have called upon God to come to their rescue; however, Adam failed that day as he stood silently by and watched Eve take on the crafty serpent by herself. That day Adam failed to be a godly man. That day Adam failed to tell his wife clearly the Lord’s command and warning about not eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam was silent! Even today, too many men still continue to fail as godly men and are silent, not leading their families in loving God, obeying God, and serving God. Not only did Adam do a poor job in communicating to Eve what God demanded of them, but also stood by and watched the whole tragedy unfold, despite being the one God had given very clear warnings and instructions about the forbidden tree. Many men also continue to fail today, by letting the women deal with spiritual issues, when they should be the ones taking the lead in spiritual matters, leading their families in prayer and devotions.

Tragically, in his weakness Adam allows Eve to confront the serpent – remaining silent as Eve inaccurately answers the serpent’s question, revealing that she was uncertain and unclear of what God had told Adam. In his deceptive ways the serpent asks Eve, **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”** To which Eve replies, **“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die’”** (Genesis 3:1-3). At that point Adam didn’t step in and correct Eve, setting things straight that God didn’t say that. YES, there were two special trees in the centre of the garden, but they were only commanded to not eat from one of the trees, from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This clearly indicates that when Satan slithered into the garden that day they had not eaten from the Tree of Life. So, what was it about the Tree of Life that prevented them from eating its fruit? While the fruit from the forbidden tree was said to be good for food, desirable and pleasing to the eye, but nothing was said about the fruit on the Tree of Life. Could it be that the fruit on the Tree of Life looked very different. Perhaps its fruit was unappealing, possibly

even revolting, looking like something that would make you sick if you ate it, or possibly even deadly. So, they had stayed clear of this tree all of this time they had lived in the garden before the serpent slithered in and approached Eve.

Possibly the fruit from these two trees – represented the upside down Kingdom of God. The fruit of the Tree of Life looking like it would kill its eater rather than bringing life, and possibly that was the mystery. It would take faith to eat the unappealing fruit from the Tree of Life. Faith pleases God! In fact, according to **Hebrews 11:6**, ***“without faith it is impossible to please God.”*** In the same way, faith is required of us to partake in the revolting thought of eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood as we celebrate Communion, as we share in Christ’s death on the cross. It turns out that the Tree of Life is symbolic of Jesus Christ, Eternal Life Himself! These two trees were side-by-side in the center of the garden, and the fruit that looked like it would bring death, actually would bring life to the eater; while the fruit that looked pleasing and desirable acting as if it would bring life, actually brought death. It was upside-down like everything else in the Kingdom of God, requiring faith in a good God who only wants the best for His children, but true love must always be tested.

The four Gospels tell us in numerous places how Jesus tried to teach us about God’s upside-down kingdom. Jesus made statements like these:

- To the rich man Jesus said, ***“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first”*** (Matthew 19:30).
- To the religious Pharisees Jesus said, ***“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you”*** (Matthew 21:31).
- To His disciples who tried to keep the children away Jesus said, ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it”*** (Mark 10:14-15).
- To a Pharisee named Nicodemus Jesus said, ***“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again”*** (John 3:3).
- To Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus Jesus said, ***“the one who believe in me will live, even though they die”*** (John 11:25).

The Kingdom of God is an upside-down kingdom – foolishness to the wise, but wisdom to those who live in faith!

Another inaccuracy of Eve's reply to the serpent was they were not even to – ***“touch it, or you will die.”*** Remember, God blessed Adam and told him, ***“Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground”*** (Genesis 1:28). That means God gave Adam the responsibility to take care of the garden, he would be like an arborist, pruning the trees to make them more productive, and cutting out unwanted trees or branches. So, I'm sure God would have allowed Adam to go into the middle of the garden and touch those two trees and even cut down that Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; thereby, getting rid of the problem if he wanted to. That's the only way to deal with sin, get rid of it immediately, so it's not a temptation. I'm also sure Adam could have also stepped forward and taken charge over Satan, calling him out for the pure evil that he was, sowing lies and half-truths to deceive them, and then taken Eve by the hand and led her away from that place, but Adam was weak! Instead of using his God given authority in the garden and trusting in his heavenly Father, Adam stood back and allowed Eve to reply to the devil each time he spoke. They didn't resist the devil, and Eve became convinced of Satan's lies of deception, believing that the fruit would be desirable for gaining wisdom and they would become like God, knowing good and evil. So, Eve reached out and took the forbidden fruit and ate it, and also handed some to Adam, who also ate. What a great disappointment Adam must have been to God for not taking authority over Satan!

The consequences were immediate and devastating for their poor choice – ***“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves”*** (Genesis 3:7). Like all sin, their lives were instantly filled with guilt and shame, and now developed an unhealthy fear of God, as they hid from Him when God came walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Sin damaged their loving relationship with God their Creator, causing them to start making excuses for their disobedience, much like all children when they are confronted by their parents. Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent, but you will notice something missing here, neither one of them repents or takes responsibility for their sinful actions, which would have been the right response. I have often wondered what would have happened if they would have immediately repented and fallen on the mercy and grace of God! Where would we be today?

As they ate the forbidden fruit – it entered their bodies, and like the way of all food, it became part of them, they become one with the food, as we often say, “*you are what you eat.*” Sin entered every cell of their body, right into their cellular DNA, so as the father and mother of all future generations, every person’s DNA is infected with original sin, passed down from generation-to-generation. That day sin became part of humanity, and now God had to deal with the problem that has infected and tainted His good creation.

God now had two options available to Him:

- 1) He could get rid the world of sin by getting rid of us and start over.
- 2) He could send a Saviour to earth who would pay the death penalty that came from eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil; thereby, restoring God’s relationship with all of mankind. Thankfully, God opted to send us a Saviour!

In the garden on that historic day – Adam and Eve became self-centered with the knowledge of good and evil, so they now thought they had the right to play god and judge everyone and everything. God now had a serious problem on His hands, if Adam and Eve would now reach out and eat from the Tree of Life, they would live in their sinful condition for all of eternity. I believe if they had done so, then like Satan and the rebellious angels that fell from Heaven, God would not be able to redeem us. So, all because God still loved His rebellious children and wanted one day to be redeemed, God has no choice but to banish them from the garden into the hostile land outside of Eden. Even though it grieved God’s heart, God had no choice but to practice tough love by removing them from the Garden of Eden. But first we read in **Genesis 3:21-24** that their loving heavenly Father in grace shed innocent blood to clothed Adam and Eve in garments of animal skin before driving them out of the garden and placing a powerful angel at the entrance to prevent them from ever entering Eden again. I’m sure that as God walked His children out of the Garden that day, it was a very emotional day for all of them, with tears all around. But thankfully that day God also promised that one day mankind will be able to re-enter a restored Eden according to **Revelation 22:3**, “*No longer will there be any curse.*” But before that can happen, we have to go to another garden!

God’s love story began in a garden with a tale of two trees, where God promised in **Genesis 3:15** that one day out of a virgin will come a God/man that will crush the

serpent's head. And that promise of a Saviour came to fulfilment thousands of years later in another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, when the Son of God took upon Himself the original sin of Adam and Eve, paying its price in full on a cross at place called Calvary. So, it's fitting that the wooden cross on which Jesus, the perfect obedient Son of God was crucified and shed His blood, came from a tree. It's fitting that in another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ became the second Adam. The first Adam only had to reach out and eat from the Tree of Life in the garden and receive eternal life; instead, he cut himself off from the life that God had planned for him and brought us death, and brought frustration and decay to God's good creation. And as a result of the first Adam's poor choice, all of mankind had to wait thousands of years for God to send a second Adam, a Saviour, to bring us back to the abundant life that God desired for mankind.

What a glorious Saviour is Jesus Christ the Son of God who we serve – for He has delivered us forever from the negative effects of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Delivering us from the tainted DNA that has been passed down from our ancestors. Two thousand years ago, nailed to a tree on Good Friday, Jesus cancelled the negative effects of sin and death, defeating that ancient serpent, Satan himself, so that now and forever-more, we can be in union with Christ Jesus. As Jesus said, ***“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day”*** (John 6:53-54). Every time we celebrate Communion, we are given access to the Tree of Life that stood in the Garden of Eden, nullifying the fruit taken from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Every time we reach out and take and eating the bread that represents Christ's body and drink the wine that represents Christ's shed blood, we receive God's promise of eternal life.

At Communion the invitation is given to come and eat the fruit from the Tree of Life, and the invitation and promise is available for everyone. The only requirement on our part is belief, belief that Jesus is who said He is, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Tree of Life, and then come to the Communion table and partake in faith. So, by taking and eating that fruit, we become one with the Tree of Life, taking on the qualities of Christ, and then become Trees of Life to others as we represent Jesus to all we meet. In that way, we fulfill God's original intended purpose for mankind as His loving sons and daughters.

We also have to realize that all of God's creation was infected that day when sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden, and since that day, creation has been waiting in anticipation, like a pregnant mother waiting the delivery of her baby, to be restored. Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes about the glorious destiny that awaits us in **Romans 8:18-25 (The Passion Translation)**: ***"I am convinced that any suffering we endure is less than nothing compared to the magnitude of glory that is about to be unveiled within us. The entire universe is standing on tiptoe, yearning to see the unveiling of God's glorious sons and daughters! For against its will the universe itself has had to endure the empty futility resulting from the consequences of human sin. But now, with eager expectation, all creation longs for freedom from its slavery to decay and to experience with us the wonderful freedom coming to God's children. To this day we are aware of the universal agony and groaning of creation, as if it were in the contractions of labor for childbirth. And it's not just creation. We who have already experienced the firstfruits of the Spirit also inwardly groan as we passionately long to experience our full status as God's sons and daughters—including our physical bodies being transformed. For this is the hope of our salvation. But hope means that we must trust and wait for what is still unseen. For why would we need to hope for something we already have? So because our hope is set on what is yet to be seen, we patiently keep on waiting for its fulfillment."***

So we wait as people of faith, because we are people who live in hope regardless of what is taking place around us, knowing there is victory for us over death and sickness. They cannot defeat a child of God who is committed and sold out in following Christ!

The tale of two trees tells us that for us to enter into Eternal Love, the God that is Love needed to know we truly love Him. That's why the Gospel is all about love, Christ giving us His life so we could be one with Him forever, immersed in his burning love. When we accept that love, we become children of God, and as sons and daughters with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon us, Christ's glory comes to us, enters us, fills us, and envelops us, and that's how we experience the firstfruits of the Spirit. The firstfruits of the Spirit includes His gifts, His wisdom, and His transforming power, but we are not there yet – we and all of creation are still waiting, groaning with anticipation that state of glorification. So, we groan inwardly, along with God's creation, to experience the fullness of God's glory as His sons and daughters, awaiting and anticipating the return of our Saviour!

I believe that every time we gather together as His church, we are given the opportunity to eat from the Tree of Life, and by doing so, we become Trees of Life for others. And as Trees of Life we are not defeated or discouraged by pain or suffering, health issues and even death; instead, as people of faith we live in hope, as we continue to wait patiently in joyful expectation for that day when God will make all things new – when Eden will be re-stored, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. What a glorious day that will be!