

Empire Church of the Brethren
Sunday Service Sermons

08 September 2024

A Tree of Testing or a Tree of Trusting

Text: "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?"

We are in *Genesis*, "beginnings".

Some Christians believe that we no longer need to study or pay attention to the Old Testament. We are a New Testament church and base who we are on the life and teaching of Christ.

I disagree.

The Old Testament set the stage for the New Testament and the life and teaching of Christ.

Jesus "The Christ" make no sense without the Old Testament history of God working with his creation.

Ken Ham and his creation museum teaches on how the main reason mankind is in such a mess today is the ignoring of "Beginnings".

It is in the creation narrative that we understand how the world is made and how mankind is to live.

We are looking at the way Satan comes against mankind.

And it began in *Genesis*.

Genesis records the beginning of the world, humankind and sin.

We invited Satan to the party.

By listening and pondering what he had to say, then tasting to see if he or God was right.

Mankind had a choice.

Curse or blessing and we chose curse.

We chose it because we believed a lie.

We believed that we could be our own God, choosing for ourselves good and evil.

And we are not equipped to make those choices.

Genesis, the first chapters, give us an understanding of the nature of God, the nature of humans, and the nature of sin, and it gives answers about human's relationship to self, to others, and to God.

By being grounded in *Genesis* the rest of the Bible becomes more understandable.

Why were these two trees in the garden?

Was God setting up Adam and Eve for their ultimate disobedience?

Is God really to blame for the fall of mankind, or did the tree serve another purpose?

Necessity of the tree.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was necessary because of the nature of God and because of the nature of man, as well as because of the nature of the gift God offered to Adam and Eve and continues to offer to each or us today.

The Garden of Eden was an idealistic place where God had placed the first humans.

They had purpose, to tend the garden.

God invited Adam to join God in the ongoing creation of God's world.

God met Adam's every need, even to the point of providing him a worthy companion in Eve.

Yet in the midst of this perfect place God planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and declared that "when you eat of it you will surely die."

As we see this death was not an immediate physical death but it is the death of the relationship between God and his creation.

But why the tree?

Answering that question plunges us into the depths of truth about God and mankind.

Man was made in the image of God.

God wanted to share the quality and nature and eternity of his life with mankind.

It shows a God who at the very core is a giving, sharing being.

God's gift to mankind is not damnation from a tree, even though the tree is central to the story.

God's gift is and always has been himself.

Yet to have God, there must be something like that tree in every person's experience.

What is the nature of mankind?

The balance between the sovereignty of God and the freedom of mankind is difficult to determine.

Humans are responsible beings before God.

They are not puppets manipulated by strings on the fingers of a benign dictator called God.

Humans are free to respond to God, to accept his gift or reject it.

Just as God, at the core of his being, is loving, giving, and sharing; so humans, at the core of their beings, are responsible and free to say yes or no.

Added to the complexities of a sovereign God and free humans is the nature of gift.

A teenage boy wanted to have a motorcycle.

The weekend before his birthday his father took him shopping.

They passed a moped, and the father asked the boy if he would like to have one.

The son's response was sarcastic, "I wouldn't have one," he retorted.

"I want a Kawasaki."

The Kawasaki's were much bigger and more expensive.

They walked on and finished their shopping, and it was some years before the boy learned that his father had saved his money and had been prepared to buy him the moped as a birthday gift if he would accept it; but he would not.

For a gift to be a gift, it must be freely given and freely accepted.

If the giver is not free to give, then it is not a gift; it is extortion.

If the receiver is not free to receive, it is dictatorial high-handedness.

Role of the tree.

How does one blend together God's giving, humankind's receiving and the nature of the gift?

The Genesis story does it with the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Man lived in the midst of God's perfect creation.

To demonstrate that Adam and Eve freely accepted God's gift of himself, God asked obedience to only one command.

Do not eat of the tree.

In a word Adam and Eve were to trust God and obey him.

To do so would maintain the relationship of free gift.

To disobey would be to reject God's gift, resulting in death.

Adam and Eve chose the course of rebellion against God and were driven from their perfect garden.

Their relationship with God was broken when their bodies ceased to be the pure abode of the Spirit of fellowship with God.

Their view of themselves was altered, and barriers were erected in their relationship with each other.

Although they did not physically die they perished never the less because of their disobedience.

God's desire is that all people come to repentance.

He wishes for all to freely accept his gift and to demonstrate that acceptance by living a life characterized by trust and obedience to God.

We all must trust God.

We need to be confident in and dependent on the character, ability, and strength of God.

We constantly deal with trust.

Children must trust their parents decisions and direction.

The same is true in marriage.

We are talking about a trusting relations with God through Jesus Christ.

God gave his Son for us to have a way out of our sinfulness.

A history of trusting God.

Adam and Eve were asked to trust God by obeying him and not eating of a certain tree.

Israel was asked to trust God and obey his commands.

Through Jesus we are called to trust his redemption.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our lord.”

Whether it be Adam and Eve, the children of Israel, or us, the decision is the same.

Will we trust God and find eternal life, or will we trust ourselves and reap death and the curse?

We must respond with confident dependence on God through faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Then these words live in us, “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you

did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of

Sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father.”

The sons and daughters of God are to live each day in the same type of assured reliance on God.

That does not mean we will always understand everything God wants us to do.

It means only that we will obey.

And in that obedience find life everlasting.