

The Tree of Life, Genesis 2:9 Revelation 22:1-7

Introduction

One evening a woman was driving home when she noticed a huge truck behind her that was driving uncomfortably close. She stepped on the gas to gain some distance from the truck, but when she sped up the truck did too. The faster she drove the faster drove the truck. Now scared, she exited the freeway. But the truck stayed with her. The woman then turned up a main street, hoping to lose her pursuer in traffic. But the truck ran a red light and continued the chase.

Reaching the point of panic, the woman whipped her car into a service station and bolted out of her auto screaming for help. The truck driver sprang from his truck and ran toward her car. Yanking the back door open, the driver pulled out a man hidden in the backseat. The woman was running from the wrong person. From his high vantage point, the truck driver had spotted a would-be rapist in the woman's car. The chase was not his effort to harm her but to save her even at the cost of his own safety.

Likewise, many people run from God's provision of atonement on the **cross**, fearing what He might do to them. But His plans are for good not evil – to rescue us from the hidden sins that endanger our lives; that threaten our eternal destiny and the current blessedness of this life.

Transition

At the Cross Jesus was repairing the creator-creature relationship. At the Cross Jesus was restoring what had been previously broken in the Garden of Eden; namely the intended beauty of the relationship between God and man. God created humanity in His very image; Imago Dei.

Man was created to live in harmony with the world around him and in the splendor of closeness with His creator; God. The trouble is that from the very beginning human freedom has entailed human failure and sin. God, in creating humanity in His very image, gave to man the freedom to create; the freedom to love; the freedom to obey; and necessarily the freedom to rebel.

It is in our freedom, at least in part, that we see the image of God within us. We have been created with moral capacity for good and evil, complexity in creative ability and culpability for our actions. All of this is true; God is sovereign and He has given us free will and choice. We are at the same time responsible for our actions, accountable to our creator, and free to make our own choices.

Inherent in having been created Imago Dei is the possibility of our misusing our creative nature in rebellion to God; just as Adam and Eve, though tempted, did. At the Cross we find Jesus, whom the Bible refers to as the second Adam, atoning for sin and restoring the broken relationship between God and man.

I Corinthians 15:21-22 says, “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” (NKJV) That is what Calvary’s Cross is all about; reconciliation between God and man, and subsequently, a means of reconciliation between man and man as we are enabled to love one another by the power of God’s grace.

That’s what we will be talking about this morning: The Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden which was lost, the restored Tree of Life in the book of Revelation which is promised, and the Tree of Life which has brought about the hope of the reconciliation of the two – *the Cross of Jesus Christ!*

The Garden

In the very beginning of creation God placed mankind in a state of perfection. Adam walked with God daily, spoke to Him, and knew Him in an intimate personal way that often seems terribly foreign to us today. Surely we are all at least familiar with the story of how Satan, the fallen and formerly chief angel of God, appeared to Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent and tempted Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She later gave that fruit to Adam to eat.

This is the account of the fall of humanity into sinful rebellion and disobedience to God. According to the Genesis account there were two trees in the Garden of Eden which were of particularly special value; the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Humanity ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and became, not gods as Satan had promised, but quit to the contrary, invited death through sin into man’s dominion; the earth.

Up to this point humanity had lived in perfect connection to God. Had sin not entered the world, this relationship with God would have remained the same. Prior to the fall there was no sickness and no death; the world was as it was intended to be; a blissful paradise of communion with God. Man had been given dominion by God to rule and reign in peace over all that He had created and in harmony with his fellow man. We see the effects of the fall all around us, even to this day.

I, as most or all of you do doubt do as well, remember vividly where I was on the morning of September 11, 2001. I turned on the news just as the second plane hit.

I watched for several minutes and witnessed live the towers falling to the ground. It was a great tragedy which will not soon be forgotten. The images are seared into the minds of most every American and many people around the globe as a result of the images which were broadcast on television.

Perhaps the most sobering part of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City, though, was the aftermath of the disaster. It took several months for firefighter and rescue and work crews to even begin to adequately clean up the disaster. The rubble pile smoldered for weeks after the crashes.

We, like the rescue workers and firefighters and clean up crews, are standing amidst the aftermath of a terrible disaster. We look around at the horrifying ability of man to harm his fellow man, we see the curse of sickness and death which was brought about by sin, and we see the rebellion of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve all around us; though most often we live our lives as though this is how it is supposed to be. The trouble is with our perspective.

Rather than holding onto an eternal perspective on the nature of this life and the realities of this world, our minds become trapped in the temporary view from amidst the rubble and the debris from the fall of mankind into sinful rebellion.

When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they chose their own way and disunity with God rather than obedience and harmony with God. In this fallen state God removed them and their lineage, us, from the Garden, as the Bible says in Genesis 3:22, "... lest he (mankind) put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (NKJV)

It is an interesting side note to consider that the biblical text does not suggest or imply anywhere that these are anything other than literal trees which possessed the ability to give eternal life and to make one cognoscente of good and evil; thus removing the state of innocence that Adam and Eve had enjoyed up to this point.

Many modern have dismissed the Genesis account on the basis that it is not scientifically viable that the fruit of any tree could possibly have the ability to grant such gifts. I would suggest to you that until modern science can prove what causes aging and sickness to begin with, I will leave my faith in the God who has proven Himself in the very act of creating all that is, which science itself tries, rather vainly at times, to understand. If the Bible is to be trusted as a reliable record of God's dealings with humanity then there is nothing within the text to suggest that these trees are anything other than literal trees.

At the fall, mankind is stripped of access to his intended state of perfect communion with God, eternal life, and the Garden of Eden, but, as the famous radio commentator would say, “That is not the end of the story.”

Blessed Hope

Immediately following the fall of Adam and Eve, God, in His infinite wisdom and foreknowledge, sets out His plan to redeem humanity to Himself; to make an offer of salvation available to fallen humanity. In Genesis 3:15 the Lord declares, “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” (NKJV)

Though Jesus would come to suffer and die as a propitiation for sin, He is coming back in glory to crush the head of the serpent, the Devil, and to establish His reign on earth; this is our blessed hope! One day we will regain access to the Tree of Life. One day Christ will return for His bride – the Church.

1 Peter 1:19 says, “...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” 2 Peter 3:14 goes on to say, “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” (NKJV) Peter is telling us that Christ Church, we who have placed our trust in Jesus Christ, are made clean by Christ blood alone.

God has made salvation possible to all humanity through the blood of Christ and He has called out for Himself a people through the gift of faith. All have been invited but few are they who choose to partake. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (NKJV)

Jesus Christ is coming back. I’ll not soon lay any claims to predicting when, but He has promised that He is coming back to establish His reign on earth, to reestablish what was intended; that God and man might live in perfect communion with one another, that man and man, woman and woman, woman and man, might live the abundant life that God intended from the very beginning.

Revelation 21:3-5 says, “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” (NKJV)

Write, for these words are true and faithful... this is not a nursery rhyme, this is not a vain and empty promise that preachers make to comfort those who mourn, Jesus, who, according to eye witness testimony and sound historical evidence, rose from the dead... says that **these words are true and faithful**.

Revelation 22:1-7, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” (NKJV)

The Cross

The ultimate Tree of Life is the Cross of Christ. The Cross is the tree that built the bridge upon which we might walk from the *separation* of the Garden of Eden to the *communion* of the New Jerusalem. At the Cross Jesus did two things.

First, He highlighted the brokenness of the world’s ways. While those of the world seek power through force, Jesus showed His power through peace. While the world seeks to dominate and oppress, Jesus came to serve and save. As the world crushed a sinless man, that sinless man cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34 NKJV)

At the Cross Jesus paid the price of the sin debt which no amount of effort on our part could ever have paid. Forgiveness of our sins, salvation, has nothing at all to do with us! Even the gift of faith through which we come to God is a gift that He gives to us! Salvation is God’s work alone; let none of us think that salvation is the result of our good efforts, our good deeds, or our good heritage.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV)

Imagine if you will a scale. On one side of the scale, firmly forcing that side all the way down, is a huge black piece of the heaviest and ugliest mass of rocky slimy sludge-like material imaginable. If, in your imagination it seems immovable, that is because it is!

On the other side of scale are our good works in the shape of so many little gold and silver bars. First to be placed on the pile on our side of the scale is a gold bar representing baptism. Though heavy and significant the scale does not even budge! Next to be placed on the scale is a large silver bar which represents confirmation and our Sunday school certificate, still fresh in its frame, though somewhat yellowed by the years; the scale does not even move a little.

On and on it goes, seemingly without end; though we have amassed a great pile of good works, though we have done what we thought was right, it is simply not enough. But just when we are ready to give up hope, in walks our savior, Jesus Christ, who unburdens Himself with a splintered, scarred, bruised, and bloody Cross; placing it on our side of the scale.

The weight of that Cross is far more than that of the blackened mass of sin on the other side! The weight of the Cross causes the scales to fly out of balance in favor of our forgiveness, for it was at the Cross that the chains of sin were broken and access to the tree of life restored!

Conclusion

“The highest joy to the Christian almost always comes through suffering,” said Alexander Maclaren. “No flower can bloom in Paradise which is not transplanted from Gethsemane. No one can taste of the fruit of the tree of life that has not tasted of the fruits of the tree of Calvary. The crown is after the cross.”

Our blessed hope, a trustworthy assurance, is that we will once again eat of the Tree of Life as we have been given access to the grace of God through the Cross of Calvary. Amen.