

Jesus, the Tree of Life

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. There are some movies or shows, some bits of history that, especially movies and shows, if you miss the opening scene, you won't understand anything else in the story. The opening scene in some miniseries, in some shows, it's so critical, that sets the tone for the rest of the show, that if you miss it, it's a big problem. You won't understand the plot. There'll be holes, there'll be misunderstandings, there'll be question marks that will be in your head that you won't quite understand. We'll be in Genesis chapter 3 this morning, and this is one of those bits of scripture that if you don't get it, the story arc of the rest of the Bible will be hard to understand. In fact, you won't be able to understand it.

Matt read from a bit of Genesis 2, but then in Genesis 3 as well, and it's the story of when sin entered the world. So we'll be talking about sin this morning. We're taking a break from George's series in Colossians, and we'll be talking about sin. Sin, for you, if you hear the term, you might think, I'm not really feeling like, I don't know, a guilt trip this morning, or that reminds me of Prohibition, or religious fundamentalist zealots that the media make as caricatures of us Christians. Sin is one of those touchy subjects, but it's actually very important for us to understand what sin is, and especially in the opening chapters of Genesis. Let me just tell you that a proper biblical understanding of sin is absolutely crucial and relevant if we are to figure out not just what the Bible is about, but what our lives are all about. So if you have a Bible, please turn with me to Genesis chapter 3 to follow along. There's some Bibles here at the front. If you have forgotten yours, if you don't have one, by all means grab a Bible. If you want to keep it and take it home, it's our gift to you. Genesis chapter 3. We'll jump in, but first, we'll see three things that this text tells us about sin. First, the cause of sin. Second, the consequence of sin.

And third, and most importantly, the cure for sin. So the cause, the consequence, and the cure. So first, the cause of sin. What exactly is sin? I'll define it as this, and then I'll unpack it because this is a mouthful. What you're going to hear right now is going to be a mouthful. Sin is the overwhelming desire for self. Self-actualization, self-fulfillment, self-gratification, apart from the good and act of God.

So it was a mouthful. It's still a mouthful. I'll unpack it. In chapter 2 of Genesis, God tells Adam that everything is good and it's legitimate for him to eat except for one thing. Let's take another read at it. Verses 16 and 17. And the Lord commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. It's interesting that this is the only prohibition that is given to the man and the woman. Man's entrusted to communicate this to his wife. And just a quick thing I want to draw your attention to, and kind of keep it in the back of your mind because it'll come up later, is that even the tree of life isn't prohibited for them to eat.

[4 : 22] All the trees, including the tree of life, is theirs to eat except for one tree, the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But why? Why this prohibition? Theologians, I mean, have had a ton of different... They're trying to figure this out. What does this mean? Why the prohibition?

I just, not to get into any controversy, I'll put forward this to you. I want to suggest that the reason that God prohibited the eating of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that he wanted to test the trust of Adam and Eve.

He wanted to see if Adam, who had everything at his fingertips, including this wondrous task of tending God's creation, and knowing the Creator would trust that God was good, and that his way was trustworthy and worthy of complete obedience, that God was truly the King over all, the Creator over all, and that his presence was more than enough for fulfillment, to live under the good and complete rule of God.

So what happens? Adam fails to communicate this to Eve. Eve is tempted by the serpent. Both her and Adam eat the prohibited fruit.

[5 : 51] Everything is a mess. And then they go on to blame each other, blame the serpent. It is a terrible, terrible mess. So this tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And the serpent, deceiving them, said that if you eat of it, you won't actually die. It's important for us to understand that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil isn't just a tree that somehow gives them knowledge, as if they were dummies beforehand.

That they didn't know left from right, or they didn't know right from wrong. It's more than that. In Genesis 3, 4, and 5, this is what the serpent says.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die, for God knows when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

The thing with this tree is that to eat of it, to know good and evil, is to actually say that you are the authority of good and evil. That's why the serpent says, Listen, God, he doesn't know what he's talking about.

[7 : 08] He's just afraid that you're going to be just like him. That you're going to steal his thunder, steal his authority. That somehow, you know, that the throne is just his, and he's just this egomaniac.

Like, his rule isn't very good. You could do a better job than God. What the serpent is tempting Adam and Eve with is rebellion against God's rule.

As if they could do it better than him. So they eat of it. They rebel against God's goodness and rule. They launch a coup against God.

As if that is even possible. And they were saying that their ultimate form of existence, the ultimate human experience, is autonomy from their creator.

Their standards, not God's standards, but their standards would be absolute. We see this today because our culture wants the good life of God.

[8 : 16] And just pause real quick. I say our culture as if they're out there and they're not here. Okay? We want the kingdom, but we don't want the king.

We want all the goodness of what it means to live in peace and harmony, to know true fulfillment, but just not under the rule of God. We'll figure it out ourselves.

It's like all the pursuits of many, many political ideologies have at the end utopia.

Or movies picture this good life. It's this collective thought that seems to haunt the human condition. We want the good life. We want to get back to Eden, but we just don't want to get back to Eden if it means coming under God's rule.

[9 : 22] So how, in a way, in addition to that, how does this apply to us personally? Well, it means that, I mean, it's not like as if you and I have launched a coup against God.

Something so ridiculous as if somehow we could ascend to the heavens and kick God off his throne. It's not like that. But our actions say otherwise. If the essence of sin is the overwhelming desire for the self, apart from God, we all live in a way where our actions, first and foremost, benefit us.

That our motives are self-centered. Now, our motives oftentimes, and this is generalization, but I think it's a good and apt generalization that our motivations are fueled by fear or pride.

What do I mean? So pride, for example, if one is doing charity, it's a very good thing, but how often are people doing charity on a consistent basis completely anonymously, apart from all of the wonderful anonymous givers that gave to the Bible House project?

But in general, people do charity and they do it in a loud kind of way. They want a pat on the back, a plaque, maybe an article in some periodical or something online, a news, whatever.

[10 : 55] And by the way, it's still good that charity happens. I'm not trying to say, you know, if you can't do charity with good motives, then you shouldn't give and you shouldn't be charitable. No, I mean, just trying to draw your attention to what motivates us to be charitable.

I think it's pride. We want to be seen as excellent people, upright people. But then there's fear as well. This is an example that hits closer to home.

So growing up in Southern Ontario, I mean, I worked from when I was in like grade five, but when I was in high school, I had a job at a grocery store and myself and a few others, it turns out there was a lot more than us, but we all got fired for stealing at the grocery store.

And we didn't do this in like, we didn't think of ourselves as thieves because we would know somebody in the meat department or the deli or the bakery and they would just print off a new barcode with a way cheaper price.

Like when you're getting tenderloin for 12 cents, you know, it's stealing. I don't say that to brag. I say it because I was a stupid 15 year old. I was completely boneheaded and I deserve to get fired. [12:14] Thank God I got fired. But I got a job right after that at Zellers back when Zellers existed in Canada. And I thought I'm going to steal and I was going to steal an item and I had it in my pocket.

And then fear came on me because I didn't want to be seen as a thief. It's a good thing, but my motivation wasn't like an altruistic, I am not going to steal because stealing destroys our social fabric and it hurts God.

And, you know, my parents, they're lovely people and they don't want the reputation of having a son as a thief. No, I didn't want to get in trouble. So I snuck to the back, took the item out of my pocket, tossed it, I have no idea where, and just spent the rest of my shift in fear that I'd get caught somehow, that I'd get fired again for stealing.

It's still good that I didn't steal even though my motivation was fear. But I'm pointing out that my motivation was still so selfish. The point is this, we seldom, if ever, do good things because they're inherently good or not do bad things because they're inherently bad.

And just to be clear, so we have these mixed motives, but just to be clear, it's good in a sense that our society operates in this way and there's checks and balances.

[13:45] But again, I want to put forward to you that our motivations are inherently selfish. This reveals something very telling about the human condition, about who you are and who I am, that at the heart level, we are about ourselves.

We are about our fulfillment, our future, our reputation, our pleasure, our rule, our legacy. And yet, creation was set up by God, the Creator, for us to live under God's rule, to work and live with an eternal purpose, to know incredible fellowship and love with the One who created us.

So what then is sin? Sin is an overwhelming desire for self, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, and self-gratification apart from the good and act of God.

Sin is rebellion against God. So if sin is rebellion against God, what are the consequences? Look with me in chapter 3, verses 7 and 8.

It says this, Then the eyes of both, Adam and Eve, were opened. This is after they eat the fruit. And they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

[15:13] And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God because, sorry, of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

And it was because they were afraid. The consequences of sin are shame and fear. They were naked, the man and the woman.

Not because they were, that's just the way they rolled. They, you know, they liked to hit up, I don't know, a beach and sunbathe. It's not like that.

It's this picture of vulnerability. of intimacy without this fear of getting stomped on, this communion that is completely pure.

And all of a sudden, they ate of the fruit and then they were naked and they felt shame. Embarrassment, brokenness, and also fear.

[16:22] They ran and hid from God and what's implied in verse 8 when it says that they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

What's implied is that that's where Adam and Eve ought to have been. Walking with God, enjoying His presence. It says that they hid themselves from His presence.

But why? What's implied is that they were to be in His presence, to know His presence in the most perfect, pure way, to know peace in the most perfect, pure way.

But what happens? They have fear. They're hiding. All of a sudden, the presence of the Lord is not this wonderful thing that is the high point of human experience.

It becomes the very thing that elicits all this fear, so much so that they're hiding themselves. Creation is turned on its head.

[17:19] No longer did they walk in innocence. No longer were they now stewards of God's good creation. They're not tending to the work of creation for God's glory, enjoying it.

But rather, they're focused on the self. Inwardly looking. All of a sudden, they experience shame and fear. You can feel the loss.

Adam and Eve were ousted from the garden forever, all because they acted on the temptation to take and eat.

what's really broken in all of this is that no longer do they know God.

No longer do they know God. To be no longer connected to the creator, to no longer be connected to the life giver, or to be no longer connected to the very source of power for your existence, results in death.

[18:28] In emotional death, in relational death, in psychological death, in physical death. both temporal death, and eternal death. Sometimes the death is immediate, but oftentimes it's this gradual death.

We are alienated from God, who is the source of life. We are now subject to decay. George has this, it really is a fantastic illustration of a clipped rose.

No matter, you know, what spray, or what kind of vase, or vase, however you pronounce that, you put the cut rose in, to make it look great, it's still a cut rose.

Eventually, it will die, or it will decay. In fact, it's already severed from its life. This is exactly what God said would happen.

You, if you eat of the fruit of the knowledge of the tree of good and evil, you will surely die. So, the cause of sin, the consequence of sin, how about the cure for sin?

[19:37] Just in case anybody's feeling super bummed out, and lo, why don't we start making our way up? The cure for sin. Well, before we can talk about the cure for sin, we have to acknowledge that God curses the woman, the man, and the serpent.

Starting in verse 14, on to verse 19. We're not going to get into it, but we'll just read verse 15, and this is what it says. I will put enmity between you and the woman, this is God cursing the serpent, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. Theologians understand verse 15 as the first announcement of the gospel.

And this is why it's so important that we understand Genesis chapter 3, and we understand sin, because we need to understand verse 15, this first pronouncement of the good news, that the serpent would eventually be crushed.

And it's not as if this serpent is, it's some enemy that if only we kill, everything will go back to normal. The serpent represents all the brokenness, and all of the rebellion, all of the cheating and murder, all of the alienation, and broken families, and divorce, all of the abuse, and all of the rape, and all of the lonely holidays, all of that kind of brokenness that we go through.

[21:15] That's what the serpent represents. So verse 15 says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. Saying that right in the curses, God is saying, it's not always going to be this way. The effects of sin won't be forever.

However, it's a wonderful, wonderful, subtle, but extremely powerful announcement of what the gospel is. This theme, this gospel, is developed throughout the rest of the Old Testament, through the writings of Moses, and into the prophets, into the writings, and then into the New Testament, where it crescendos with Christ.

That Christ is the seed. The New Testament writers pick this up. In Hebrews chapter 2, verse 14, it says this, Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself, likewise, talking about Jesus, partook of the same things, that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil.

Romans 16, 20, The God of peace will soon crush Satan, under your feet. 1 John chapter 3 says this, The reason the Son of God appeared, was to destroy the works of the devil.

[22:49] This theme that we see in Genesis 3, it's just, it's woven throughout the entire story of Scripture. That God himself, immediately after the first rebellion, had taken place, orchestrated redemption.

Three things happen after the curses are given. I'll draw your attention to all three, but really we'll spend a bit of time on the third one.

The first thing is this, in verse 21, it says, It's a theme, a theme, and a picture, and a pattern, that we'll see throughout the Scriptures, that the sacrificial system, that God commanded, in the Old Testament, to be done at the temple, would be to cover, the sacrifice of an animal, would cover the shame of the people.

That ultimately, Jesus Christ himself, would die on the cross, and as a result, our shame would be no more. We see little foreshadowings here.

It's not just verse 15. It's verse 21 as well. The second thing I want to bring to your attention, is when Adam and Eve are removed from the garden, God puts a cherubim, a warrior angel with a flaming sword at the east gate.

[24 : 24] We have a kid's book at home, and it calls that, God's big keep out sign. So, if that helps you to think of it, to understand it, then great.

It's a big keep out sign. It's this picture of God, saying, no longer can you enjoy my presence. And it's interesting that, later on in Exodus, when God is giving the, the blueprint, for what the temple is supposed to look like, there's these giant curtains, and embroidered in them are to be two cherubim.

And these curtains are to separate the holy place from the most holy place. God's presence from the rest of the nation. And when Jesus dies, we see this in Matthew's account of Jesus' death. Immediately after Jesus dies, the curtains are torn. It's this wonderful picture of all of a sudden, us being allowed through Jesus, back into the presence of God.

But it's the third thing that I want to draw your attention to, in a bit more detail. God says this, remember when I, I told you to keep in the back of your mind, this idea that prior, to the, the Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit, that all the fruit, including the fruit from the tree of life, was, was good to eat.

[25 : 50] It's back in chapter two. Well, this is what God says in, in chapter three, verse 22. Then the Lord God said, behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. And in the original language, the sentence is cut off. It's as, it's as if the, I mean, the sentence is cut off.

It's an unfinished sentence. All of a sudden there's a new prohibition to not eat of the fruit of life.

And the, the tree of life, it's not like the Holy Grail that was popularized with Indiana Jones or the search for the fountain of youth, that if you only have it, you will live forever.

Uh, the tree of life is this picture throughout scripture of God's, um, perfect rule, his perfect peace.

At the end of the book of revelation, we see the tree that is, that is the source of life for all of the new creation. That's all throughout scripture.

[27 : 03] The, the tree is this wonderful, beautiful picture of, of God as, as the creator, as the life giver, as the source of life, as the wellspring.

It represents everything that humanity strives for. Everything that you and I strive for perfect peace, bounty, never to, to want no more pain, no more tears, no more broken relationships, no more shame, no more sin, but also being in the presence of God, what we were made for.

It's, it represents all of that. It's a beautiful picture. This, this idea of the tree of life, except in Exodus, where it says this interesting little bit about any person that is hung on a tree is cursed.

Any person that is hung on a tree is cursed. Jesus is hung on a tree, on a cross.

And the new Testament writers pick this up. They pick this up, both in first Peter and also in, in Galatians, in, in the apostle Paul's letter to the church in Galatia, that Jesus was hung on a tree.

[28 : 20] And that because of that, he was cursed, but he wasn't cursed because of something he did or just, you know, because he was a good guy, but not really. He messed up and he got what was coming to him on the tree.

He was cursed. He was cursed for you and I, he took on our curse. He dies on a tree. So that, that crucifix that for centuries in the Roman world was this picture of death and evil and destruction.

And if you were to be crucified, it was the very low point of what it meant to be a human being in the ancient world. And he took it. And no longer was it a tree of, of, of cursedness, but it became a tree of life.

And Jesus on the night that he was betrayed. Um, and we're actually, we've switched things up a bit, uh, today so that we could go right into communion, just to illustrate something that's absolutely wonderful.

because on the night that Jesus was betrayed, he said, take, eat, this is my body. Take, eat, uh, take drink. This is my blood.

[29 : 37] So that the, the, the very command that Adam and Eve listened, the, the, the, of the, of the serpent to take and eat that, that resulted in cursedness and brokenness and sin.

All of a sudden Jesus has taken eat. And it all, and it becomes a fruit that brings life. He is saying, take and eat of me for I am the tree of life.

It doesn't say this, but what is implied is that Jesus is the life giver, that he has reversed the curse and that partaking of, of him, of his life.

Brings us back to what life was truly like in God's presence before sin entered. All of a sudden the prohibition to not eat of the tree of life is, it's, it's no longer a prohibition.

Not only that, but, but Jesus says, I am the vine and you are the branches.

[30 : 41] And that he commands us to bear good fruit. So it's not just that he is the tree of life, but somehow mysteriously, we become part of him.

We are, we come into union with Christ so that we somehow mysteriously by God's goodness and kindness. And we become a part of this tree.

That when we testify to the goodness of God, to the, to the good news of being redeemed of, of, of the rule and reign, the good rule and reign of Christ, that we produce fruit for other people to partake in, to taste.

not our fruit, not by our power, but because this is what God has chosen to, to do, to use us broken people.

We become a part of the, the tree of life. It's, I mean, it just, it really is remarkable. So we'll go into communion and, communion is this wonderful, this, this, this meal that we have, that is a symbol, in one sense, that, that we are remembering Christ, but it is more than that.

[32 : 04] We are partaking of him by faith with thanksgiving. We, we actually taste and see that the Lord is, is good that we get to partake of the fruit of the tree of life.

So as we, as we consider these things, I would encourage you guys to think afresh of Genesis three and of sin.

Think about what it is and how destructive it is and how it's not just, don't do this. You should do this. And these series of commands, although that's a part of it, that it is this deep brokenness inside of you and me.

It is rebellion against the good rule of God. But I also want you to think afresh of Genesis 15, uh, Genesis three, verse 15, about this wonderful pronouncement that the gospel is that Christ came to destroy the works of the enemy, that he is the tree of life and that you are a part of that.

You, that you are a part of that, not just partaking of the fruit, but a part of that. I want you to meditate on it this week and think about it.

[33 : 28] Think about how that would actually change the way. God. I would encourage you guys to meditate that, meditate on that, uh, uh, uh, fresh.

So we're going to go right into communion and, uh, and let me pray. And then we will get into, um, and we will get into, uh, um, the, the communion service.

Let me pray. Lord God, we thank you so much that what Christ has done on the cross is not just taking away our sin, but, uh, but he takes away our shame and he allows us to go into the cross. And to the very presence, your very presence to, to know you in this wonderful, beautiful way, not fully, but, uh, but in part, but that we have the promise that one day we will know what that presence is to be in your, to be in your presence.

We will know it fully. And that your son took the despicable, disgusting, evil, Cruz Roman crucifix, that, that picture of brokenness in, and, and death.

[34 : 53] And he made it life. And he made the crucifix. He made the cross, a tree of life. And not just that, that he is the tree of life.

And that we, if we have faith and trust in, in him, that we are ingrafted into this tree of life. And that by his strength, by, by the, the Holy Spirit's work, we bear fruit.

Lord, we don't understand why you choose us, but we are thankful. Help us to, to know you more. Help us to, um, approach your table here, remembering what Christ has done on the cross for us. remembering that, that he has brought us from death to life. Remembering that we are now a part of his family, a part of his very body, the church, that he is making his appeal to the lost through us.

Lord, thank you for, um, your word. Thank you for, uh, along with the curse that you, uh, immediately proclaim the, the good news.

[35 : 59] Lord, help us to, uh, to grow in this truth. We love you. We ask that you'll help us to love you more in Jesus name.