

There Were Two Trees in the Garden - Part 2

by Art Katz

The sermon explores the significance of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, emphasizing the importance of obedience to God's word and the transformative power of grace through suffering and redemption.

Duration: 34:52

Scripture: Genesis 2:16-17, Exodus 19:6, Matthew 6:33, Romans 2:4, Romans 5:20, Romans 11:33, James 1:19-20

Topics: "Garden Of Eden"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the significance of examining the creation story in Genesis and how it reveals God's splendor, majesty, and wisdom. The speaker emphasizes the importance of exalting God and living in obedience to His word, as it is His provision that keeps us from sin and death. The sermon also explores the question of why God would plant two trees in the garden, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The speaker suggests that God's purpose in allowing this temptation was to test Adam and Eve's obedience and to cultivate a deep intimacy with Him.

Transcript

So have you thought about that question? Why was the one tree more attractive than the other? Of course, to be as God and to see something that promises to make you wise and is good to eat and good to look upon, speaks for itself. But why wasn't the tree of life equally as formidable and as attractive? Of course, he created it, but... I'm hoping that we're not being speculative and imaginative, but I'm really fishing for something. Why was God so quick to expel them lest they eat from the tree of life? For had they eaten from the tree of life, they would have obtained immortality in their sin, and they would have been eternally incapacitated for the redemption of God.

It was the mercy of God to drive them out of the garden and to keep them from immortality by that wrong eating. But why, when they had the opportunity, did they not eat of it? Why was it spurned, brother? Because my sneaky suspicion was that the tree of life was not as overtly attractive as the tree of knowledge. In fact, I would say that the tree of life is the cross, and the cross is unattractive.

In fact, the cross is repulsive, and the cross repels flesh. One is not drawn to it, one is repelled from it, and yet that's where the life is. So in some way, that tree from... Jesus was nailed to the tree, and in the museum at Montreal, where we went to see this special exhibit, in the general exhibit there was a medieval painting, I've never seen this before, of Jesus crucified to a tree, and the tree had fruit on it.

So the artist somehow made this equation that the cross was the tree of life itself, and in fact it is the tree of life. And he didn't forbid them, which means that it was available, it could have served them in good stead, but they chose not to be drawn to it. So what in fact is happening is the word of God is being rejected, and the word of the devil is being received.

And isn't that in fact the issue in so much of the failing of ourselves as believers, frequently, and how quick we are to receive the talk of the devil. It's amazing, the most negative kind, you're no good, you never will be, you failed again, da-da-da-da-da, whoever said you're a preacher, da-da-da-da-da, yes that's right, the Lord said you're a preacher, but you're quick to agree with the adversary, particularly when it's negative about yourself. Have you ever noticed that? You never ever dispute with the devil when he brings to your attention your own defects.

We're so quick to agree. So again, the same fundamental operation continues, it's the one speaking or another, it's the word of the one kind or another, and we seem to be, again, more prone to receive what comes from the evil one than from God. But I think we need to be instructed and be alert and not allow the enemy our ear, let alone to give him any credibility.

But how about the thought that the tree of life is the cross, and that the flesh would not necessarily be attracted to it but be repelled, that maybe it takes a deep awareness of the need for our life, that we cannot walk even in the garden, even in the Edenic place, without the continual refreshing and nourishment that comes from God. Maybe that's why they were so instantly hit with that evil temptation before they could come to the recognition that they needed to avail themselves of that tree. What was his first statement to Eve? Did he begin with, hath God said, was that the first statement in the text? What was Eve's mistake that should instruct us? She engaged in conversation, that was it.

Now isn't that itself a vanity to think that you can converse with the evil one and even match his wits and show him off. And that vanity is our undoing. So don't engage in conversation.

Don't allow the enemy a place where you're in your mind having dialogue. No, that's not true. I've always been faithful to the Lord.

But once you've given the ground of making him a credible conversationalist with yourself, you've already lost the game. He doesn't deserve any consideration that we should converse with him. Well, can I read you a little bit of Karl Barth on this subject? The Creator distinguishes himself from the creature by the fact that he exercises this power of distinction, whereas the creature is directed to accept and to approve what God, who is able and entitled to distinguish, has done, does and will do.

If the creature could go on its own judgment, reject what on God's judgment it ought to accept, it would be like God. Do you understand what he's saying? God had spoken, thou shalt not eat. What was right for the creature was to affirm God's right to give those directions, and not reluctantly or begrudgingly, but joyously and gratefully.

It's a privilege when God speaks even to give us restriction, maybe especially to give us restriction. We need to really probe what this independence means, and maybe if it's only a begrudging compliance rather than an affirmative and joyous acceptance, we are already on the ground of independence and moving toward outright sin. So we mustn't begrudge God.

I guess I got to him. He said so. Oh, I praise God he said so.

I don't understand why he said so. It's restrictive that he has said so, but I have a sublime confidence in his love, in his sovereignty, in his wisdom, and I accept it with joy. Restrict me all you want, Lord.

I love it. Whatever comes. Whatever comes.

Bless the Lord. Somebody say something there? Bless the Lord. Oh, okay.

If the creature could on its own judgment reject what on God's judgment it ought to accept, it would be like God. It's pitting judgment against judgment. It's man, in fact, acting as judge.

But the essence of what a king is, is his ability and privilege and right to judge. When man takes it upon himself to judge, he is preempting God and taking upon himself as creature the prerogative of God the creator. That's why God says, judge not, lest you be judged.

It's not your right to judge. It's not for you to ascertain, to assess, and to discern what you think is wrong about the other party. It's only the Lord knows.

And as Oswald Chambers has said in a brilliant statement in one of his morning devotionals, there's always one thing more about that person that you cannot know. Which, if you knew, would revise your whole estimation. I praise God for that thought.

There is always one thing more that you cannot know. Just when you think you've got that one nailed down, and the evidence infallibly indicts him, and you're ready to speak about that and do him in, or treat him like a leper, it's always healthy and humbling to be reminded you cannot know. It's not your privilege.

Only God is omniscient and knows in totality. And he will always keep from you that one thing more, which if you knew it, would compel you to revise your whole judgment. Therefore, do not judge.

The day will judge. And so the church ought to walk in such a tempered way, with such a walk quietly before the Lord, slow to speak, quick to hear, judicious, knowing our propensity for evil and our necessity to exalt ourselves at the expense of another. God's provision in the face of all this temptation is one thing only, his word.

And because it's his provision that keeps us from sin and from death, it's grace. That God chooses to speak a word is his gracious love to us who would otherwise invariably stumble into sin and death. But he has spoken.

You shall not eat. And we're not required to have an explanation. He doesn't have to tell us why we should not eat, so that our minds would be appeased and we would agree with his logic.

He has only to speak, thou shalt not. And it's for us as creatures to obey. But we need to recognize the word of God.

Maybe every obedience to the word is a sacrifice. Every obedience to the word is a suffering in that it means a restriction and an imposition on your natural temptation and the indulgence of flesh. In fact, if God does not call for those obediences, what then is his word? A little pat? A little sentimental suggestion? His word is always a requirement to a death in order that life might issue from it.

So may we recognize that and be willing to bear his word and count it all privilege that he has the grace to speak it to us. And can we hear it when it comes from unsuspecting vessels? Can we hear it when it

comes out of a cracked voice or something high-pitched or dyslexic or in a strange form? Is our ear attuned to hear the Lord and to recognize his speaking that we might be kept? The great test for Abraham was when God said, Take thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, and make of him a sacrifice in the month. Oh, that can't be God.

God doesn't believe in human sacrifice. That's pagan. That's Canaanite-ish.

That's the enemy imitating the voice of God. Not me. He rose up early in the morning, cut the wood saddle of his ass, and went.

He discerned. He was able. He had a history of hearing.

His son's heart was disposed to an obedience even when it contradicted his every category of knowledge of what he thought God to be and what God could legitimately ask. It was a place beyond knowledge of God by principle. It was knowledge of God by intimacy.

He didn't miss it, praise God. May the Lord cultivate such an ear in us and nurture us, because I'll tell you that in the last days, we're going to be called to such obediences that will make us stagger, that will contradict everything that we think that we understand about God, that will bring upon our heads reproaches, will be accused of, at the least, lovelessness, of anti-Semitism, as I'm already experiencing now, and many such things out of the very obedience to the voice of God. Okay, here comes the ultimate curveball.

How is it that God, the Creator, would plant two trees? Why provoke Adam and Eve, who are innocents, with the temptation that they're going to invariably fail, giving the enemy his opportunity to beguile them, when the whole thing could have been saved if he had not planted that tree in the garden at all? Why not just the tree of life alone? What is God up to? Is he a tempter, malicious? Why does he put such a temptation in the way by having a second tree? Someone was saying that Adam and Eve had to fail. There had to be this failure. They had to set in motion the whole redemptive work of God by which the cross and suffering and all of that redemptive thing would be acknowledged.

I don't want to say it was saved for what, but it's a consideration. There's a difference between innocence that comes from childlike immaturity as against the innocence that will be ours, having passed through sin and judgment and redemption. There's a place for us that is not for angels, because angels are not given the prospect that God puts before us and the way that he has created us, because we have a destiny above angels.

They're limited, if I can put it that way, to holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with your glory. We are allowed to pass through death, through suffering, through sin, through fallenness, through redemption, through faith, through sonship, through maturity, through full reconciliation with God and the fulfillment of all of his glorious redemptive work and then come to a place of innocence. It's innocence having passed through sin as against innocence that is the mere accident of infancy.

Do you understand what I'm saying? And that innocence is God's ultimate glory, because it's an innocence that has known temptation, known sin and yet chooses the way of righteousness and that is what glorifies God. What is more tempering than to know yourself to be capable of sin, having fallen in sin? What is more glorifying to God than the real appreciation, esteem and praise of God and having received his redemption from sin? What is love but gratitude? And what is service but that which is

rendered in love? And how can we be a servant people of a priestly kind who have not passed through sin and redemption? Do you understand? This is more than tending to God. This is glorifying God ultimately.

Excuse me if I repeat myself, but doesn't the beginnings, in the beginning God and creation and all of these mysteries in the garden open up a view of God in splendor and majesty and wisdom that would have been lost to us if we had just sailed through chapter 1 and 2 without the kind of examination that would have been given? Now we can exalt God our Savior. Now we can fall before him in prostration for his wisdom, for the grace of God who speaks, for the privilege of living before a God who restricts. Now we understand male and female.

Now we have a sense of the majesty and the glory of what marriage is, that they might be one. Now the church which is built on that paradigm as God's glory of the unifying of diverse saints in age and background and color and condition, that they might be one of the same mystery. This opens up when you see God as creator, and therefore this whole evolutionary thing that wants to rob God of the glory as creator and substitute an explanation of chance dismisses God as God.

Can you see that? What will heighten our appreciation is if we're not looking upon Adam and Eve as an unhappy couple who missed it, but identifying with them as being totally capable and one with them in their sin and in their fault. That makes all the difference in the depth of your appreciation for God, his grace and his mercy. We have to see ourselves in our Adamic identification and the propensity for Adamic sin still with us.

Maybe even being manifest today in this room in our comments to the degree that they have issued out of knowledge rather than out of life. Because the cross, which is God's greatest grace, has not yet had its total work in laying the axe to the root and there's still that semblance of self-life that wants exaltation, recognition, on the basis of its knowledge, the esteem. Oh, look what that one said.

And what does ruling and reigning mean? Shuffling papers in the office? Bureaucratic self-aggrandizement? Ruling and reigning is communicating to mankind the knowledge of God as God in righteousness, in mercy, in grace. Because we have been the recipients of these graces and not academically given to us in our innocence but have come to us through our own failure and through his redemption. Then we can rule and reign.

We can make him known as he in fact is, as God. And that is the hope for lost mankind. So the ruling and reigning, we have to disabuse our minds of government as the world has perniciously distorted that as a place where a guy like Clinton can have his day in the sun and have his museum or his memorial, whatever it is, and gone to hundreds of thousands and end with a retirement.

It's a self-seeking, self-aggrandizing filth that is concocted in back rooms, smoke-filled rooms. The government of God is holy, holy, holy. It's not bureaucracy.

It's bringing the wisdom of God and the knowledge of God to the nations. And that knowledge is not cheap. And that kind of service has got to issue from love or it's not a service rendered unto the Lord.

And it's got to come out of a brokenness and humiliation or we will be lording it over our subjects in our superior spirituality. So all of those things require us to have fallen in the garden with Adam and Eve and to be brought out of that expensive, painful knowledge of having to fight against thorns and thistles in nature that is now going to be adverse to us and bearing our children in pain in order to come to the place

where we can rule and reign with Him, co-heirs. And all of the richness of what that means, requiring a service out of love and a service out of humility and brokenness that cannot be obtained in any other way.

Oh, the depth of the richness. Now, Israel itself, called to be a servant people, must themselves, therefore, come through the same thing, who presently today, and I'm going to read to you before the bell rings, from an outstanding Jewish spokesman that will shock you in the way he interprets what we have been considering, who are people who have no knowledge of themselves as sinners. Self-exalting Jews who see themselves as morally and ethically superior.

I know, I was one like that for 35 years. Therefore, something has got to happen to them to bring them to an identification with Adam and an awareness of their own fallenness where it had taken the most extreme expression in the rejection and the crucifixion of their own God. To see that and to be convicted in the depths of our national reality as sinners, sharing the sins of our fathers and bringing it to a yet more horrendous state in the last days, and then to be put in the place of redemption in the final time of suffering, in the time of Jacob's trouble, and to be restored to the land yet before we even come to the place of repentance and there to abhor ourselves for our own sins and the sins of the fathers because his kindness has led us to repentance.

And out of that gratitude and love for a God whose mercy has come to us in total undeservedness, we can serve the nations and be the fulfillment of what was our call from the first, a nation of priests and a light unto the world. But except that the church has first come unto this servanthood, how shall we be to Israel what we must before Israel can be to the nations what it must? Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God who knew all this from the first in his act of creation, all of this was implicit in his design from the beginning. And imagine the church that has no apprehension of this, whose one Sunday is like another, whose service is a kind of spiritual roulette hoping to touch something that will take people out of their Saturday night stupor, having stayed all night before the TV set, and have lost this glory, have never understood this majesty of God's intention for the church, to Israel, through Israel to the nations, that we might all come, that he might unify all things in Christ.

Oh, my, my, my. Now, here's a Jewish, I think I lost my place, a Jewish spokesman. Thesis is this, the reason that God planted the two trees in the garden was not that Adam and Eve should fail, but that he wanted them to fail, he tempted them to fail, because he wanted them to exceed his prohibition, because to annul God and to refuse to obey his word is the beginning of selfhood.

It's the beginning of the finding of your humanity and your selfhood, and that God wants to be exceeded. Can you believe an interpretation like this, drawn from Talmudic sources? I'm reading it for you, not to encourage your anti-Semitism, but to break your hearts over the Jewish condition that has completely misread Scripture, and from it has found a pretext for its own humanistic assumptions that God wants us to exceed him in order to attain to our own humanity, that we might be as God. Man is beset by the existential dichotomy of being within nature and yet transcending it by the fact of having self-awareness and choice.

He can solve this dichotomy only by going forward. Man has to experience himself as a stranger in the world, estranged from himself and from nature, in order to become one again with himself, with his fellow man, with nature, on a higher level. This is kind of an evolutionary thought.

He has to experience the split between himself as subject and the world as object as the condition for overcoming this very split. Man creates himself. In the historical process, which began with his first act of

freedom, what was the first act of freedom? Disobeying God and eating from the forbidden tree.

The freedom to disobey, to say no to God, this quote corruption, he puts the word corruption in quotation marks because he's taking a dig at what Judaism calls Christian theology. They do not subscribe to the Christian understanding of the depravity of man. Man is innately good and God is wanting a human fulfillment by being disobeyed.

It's that self-assertion that puts man on the road to self-realization, selfhood and true humanity. We're saying it puts man on the road to sin and death. Man creates himself.

Listen to those words. What a slap in God's face. And this corruption lies in the very nature of human existence.

Only by going through the process of alienation can man overcome it and achieve a new harmony. Totally independent of God, he comes into this selfhood by his own self-assertion because he himself is his own creator through his own disobedience. He is God.

This new harmony, oy vey, the new oneness with man and nature, as we Jews are showing forth so beautifully in our relationship with Palestinians and Arabs, is called in the prophetic and rabbinic literature the end of days or the messianic time. It is not a state predetermined by God or the stars. Just putting the two things in one statement, God or the stars.

It will not happen except through man's own effort. The messianic age is man's own self-realization and not the expectation of some figure coming from above who shall bear in his hands the scars of the nails and the wounds that he received in the house of his friends. The reason I'm reading this is because this isn't some obtuse, rare expression.

This is at the heart of the thinking of Judaism by Arthur Cohen, a Jewish theologian and philosopher called Tremendum. He couldn't find, he was commenting on the Holocaust and he found a word that is so rare, the Tremendum, because no word can describe the magnitude of the devastation and the suffering of the Holocaust. It's an unparalleled event in modern times.

Six million Jews being tortured and brought to their death through the most brilliant civilization to which Jews themselves had celebrated. When you read through the book, it is so difficult. The language is so obtuse, so convoluted, so philosophical, but I patiently bore through.

And when you come to the end of the book, you know what he says? The reason for the Holocaust, as for all Jewish suffering, is not that it's the consequence of our sin in God's judgment, but it's the provision by which we Jews will attain to divinity, for we are the answers to the world. Our divinization is the answer to the world. And that's the explanation of why we have suffered.

Not as judgment for sin of disobedience, but rather a way in which we're being perfected unto divinity, that we might be as God. Should I tell you her? Yeah. And that there might be only one Jew in a million who could articulate something like this.

Unconsciously, by the multitude of Jews who wouldn't even begin consciously to think like that, this is an underlay in the whole of what constitutes Jewish life and understanding, even when it is religious. And this is the object of God's attention in the last days. When you know this, you'll understand why the severity of God in the last days through the time of Jacob's trouble is not God being malicious or being extreme, but

giving to this people, in measure that is needful, that corrective chastening that will disabuse them of this ages-old Kabbalistic and Talmudic mindset, contrary to God, that misemploys even the Scripture and interprets this in such a way as to give a foundation for the humanistic celebration of man and especially Jew as man.

We couldn't have seen this except in the context of what we are now discussing. And you see, we are worlds removed. They think that our view of man as sinful and depraved by nature in the Adamic taint is some kind of negative, sick depreciation because man is exalted, man is humane, man is man, man, man, man, man is the measure of all things.

Man even creates himself. God is even a concept of man. And we have done the world a favor by giving it the Bible and the concept of God as monotheistic, superior to the pagan multiplicity of gods.

We have. So, for the tape's sake and your sake, I'm not saying any of these things in any way to encourage certainly a hardness toward them, but rather a heartache, a deeper compassion for the powers of deception because these thoughts are so beguiling, so powerful, so self-exalting that they could only have had their origin in one place, from below. And we have given our ear too much to that serpent, and he has corrupted the whole of our Jewish understanding because he knew that we were intended as a nation of priests and a light unto the world.

And God's redemptive action at the end of the age is to bring this people back to himself and to the fulfillment of his original design from creation. And we are the agents through our mercy and the extending of the communication of our knowledge of him to them in their hour of extremity that brings this whole drama to a close. So, our ability to communicate God as God to those who have the most deranged view is critical for their salvation.

And that's why it's not sufficient for us merely to be correct or to be doctrinal, but to have a depth of apprehension of God as is coming to us when we're going back to the beginning and God created. Let's have a little prayer and thank the Lord for what he has set before us today and ask his mercy that we might retain it. Thank you Lord.

Holy one, what a God you are Lord. We didn't know as we ought to know. We were just touching the circumference the outer portions Lord the fringes.

But what you're revealing now your genius the mind of the Lord the heart of God the love of God that is even willing to allow us to fall to bring us to a greater place than could ever have been obtained if we were only left to our innocence. You were willing to allow us that suffering and pain because of the end that would glorify you forever. And Lord we want to say it's a privilege and we thank you for your wisdom.

My God, Lord we bless you for your majesty and your greatness as the creator. Holy one. Bring us to that gratitude which is the spring of love that we might serve you out of love and not religious obligation.

Thank you my God. The love that issues from gratitude and the gratitude that issues from an understanding and the understanding that issues not from the tree of knowledge but from the tree of life. Which we believe was our experience today.

Amen. Thank you Lord. That we came in our chaos and not knowing trusting and you have been faithful again.

Receive our gratitude Lord and break our hearts with the love of you that we cannot contain. That will be reflected in praise and worship that does not need our amplifiers and our musicology. But a spontaneous overflow of grateful hearts that cannot be silenced that is a music in heaven.

Thank you Lord. Oh we bless your name.

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