

# *Two Wisdoms*

**Genesis 3:4-8, 22-24**

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A Rochester couple decided to thaw out in Florida one February weekend. They planned to stay at the same hotel where they spent their honeymoon 20 years before. Their jobs made it difficult to coordinate their travel schedules. The husband would fly to Florida on a Thursday, and his wife would follow him the next day. The husband arrived and checked into the hotel. When he found a computer in his room, he decided to send an e-mail back to his wife; but he left out a letter in the address, and without realizing his error he sent the e-mail to a widow from Houston. She just returned from the funeral of her husband, a minister who had been called home to glory following a heart attack. The widow checked her e-mail, expecting messages from relatives and friends; but when she read the first message, she fainted. The widow's son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor, and saw the computer screen. It read:

*To: My Loving Wife; Subject: I've Arrived; You're probably surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send e-mails to your loved ones. I've just arrived and checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was. P. S. Sure is hot down here!*

There is always vulnerability in communicating with people. You don't always know the context in which they hear or read your words. That can happen with us and the Bible. We can read its pages and still miss its message. Jesus confronted the religious leaders and his own disciples with that very thing. He said:

***You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.***  
(Matthew 22:29, NIV)

With the Bible God took the care of speaking through 40 different authors over a period of a thousand years. He spoke to people in many different contexts and cultures. Often what is said in one context clarifies another, so it is important to read all the Scriptures.

A critical passage that clarifies so many others is found in the second and third chapters of Genesis. In these two chapters are descriptions of two trees and two wisdoms. We first encounter them in chapter 2. The Bible says:

***Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had created. And the LORD God planted all sorts of trees in the garden — beautiful trees that produced delicious fruit. At the center of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.***  
(Gen 2:8-9, NLT)

God planted an unusual garden. Even though the Bible says there were all kinds of trees that produced luscious fruit, only two were identified: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. These trees were named for the effect they produce in people. The tree of life produced life in human beings.

King Solomon used “tree of life” as a metaphor. He spoke of wisdom as a “tree of life” to those who embrace it (Proverbs 3:18). He said the results of righteousness is a “tree of life” (Proverbs 11:30). He wrote about the effect of dashed hopes and how dreams fulfilled are a “tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12). He called healing words a “tree of life” (Proverbs 15:4). These things produce health and life in people.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil offered a different result. Its fruit would give people a perspective or understanding of good and evil. They would acquire a moral understanding. People eating this fruit would see and think of the world in terms of good and evil, right and wrong. That picture unfolds in the third chapter of Genesis. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they immediately saw differently:

***When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked;*** (Genesis 3:6-7, NIV)

From the moment Adam and Eve obtained this wisdom, they began to see and feel things differently. They felt shame. They judged situations in terms of right and wrong. They became judges and they began to cover up parts of their lives because they feared judgment.

Have you ever noticed that young and innocent children do not fear judgment? They look at their parents with such trust. They cover up nothing. If you walk into a house with little people, you might see little streakers (and not even think of calling a Super Bowl linebacker to tackle them). It is the wisdom from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that makes us think in moral categories. Until eating this fruit, Adam and Eve thought in relational categories. They thought of what God their father wanted and said.

Read the New Testament, and you'll discover that Jesus thinks and acts exclusively in those categories. He is not a moral thinker. He is a relational thinker. When he violates the Sabbath by healing or telling someone to carry their bed, he doesn't argue right or wrong. He points to what his Father says, does, and wants. Jesus always emphasizes his Father's will. He rarely talks about good and evil. Do you remember when a rich young man called Jesus "Good Teacher" and asked him what must he do to inherit eternal life? Jesus answered:

***Why do you call me good? No one is good-except God alone.*** (Mark 10:18, NIV)

Jesus is saying that in terms of salvation moral judgment won't help. It is irrelevant, misleading.

What then will help? In the beginning Adam and Eve were permitted to eat from the Tree of Life. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was banned. It was forbidden. However, when they disobeyed and acquired this new wisdom, the Tree of Life was now

forbidden. People often assume that death, separation from the Tree of Life, came because of disobedience; but read what the Bible actually says:

***The LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever. (Genesis 3:22, NIV)***

Adam and Evil were separated from the Tree of Life and experienced death because they now were like God, knowing good and evil. They were threats. Although God is the only judge, they now thought like judges. Their thinking made them competitors. They were no longer companions and partners carrying out their Father's will. They now second guessed and had their own code of fairness and justice. They lived according to a different wisdom, a different understanding, a moral knowledge. That vision would be manipulated by the Serpent and bring destruction. Solomon affirmed this and wrote:

***There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12, NIV)***

God wanted his children back as companions. Death was a curse, but it also provided the opportunity for a new life. Most, if not all redemptive images of the Old and New Testaments involve death and a new life coming from it. With that new life comes a new vision. Morality is irrelevant. God's will is supreme. Martin Luther weighed in on the subject. He declared:

***Morality is the concern of lawyers, judges, and hangmen. My concern is your God relation.***

God relation is what really matters, and that is what Jesus is all about. Jesus is the Tree of Life, not merely in the metaphor of Solomon, but in the imagery of Genesis. He produces life.

Ezekiel had a vision of a river of life and the Tree of Life. He wrote:

***All kinds of fruit trees will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. There will be a new crop every month, without fail! For they are***

***watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing.*** (Ezekiel 47:12, NLT)

At the Feast of Tabernacles that celebrated this prophecy, Jesus identified himself as that river with those trees. Jesus said:

***If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.*** (John 7:37, NIV)

In the book of Revelation, John wrote:

***The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*** (Revelation 22:1-3, NIV)

Jesus is that tree that feeds and heals. He instituted a ritual of eating and drinking himself. In other words, we are eating the fruit from the Tree of Life, as we draw our vision and identity from him. He is the Tree of Life.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil makes us judges in the world. The Tree of Life makes us lifeguards bent on rescuing our brothers and sisters. Whether someone is good or evil is a judgment for a judge. Whether someone tastes the fruit from the Tree of Life is the concern of a lifeguard. If Jesus came not to judge but to save, why do we talk about good and evil rather than people's relationship and obedience to the Father? As his disciples only that is relevant. For example, the issue isn't whether gay marriages are good or bad. The issue is what the Father's will is, what is people's relationship to Jesus, and how we help them with that?

Will you live your life as a judge or a lifeguard? Will you focus on what is right and what is wrong? Or will you focus on eating and sharing the fruit from the Tree of Life? There are two trees, two wisdoms, two lives and two destinies. Which do you choose? Choose the right tree and wisdom. Choose Jesus.