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The Tree of Life

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Series: Making the Spiritual Switch



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The Tree of Life

CRISIS AT THE CITY GATE

There is a still greater truth to be drawn from the Tree of Life in the garden of Eden. The story of man unfolds rather quickly after Adam and Eve make their decisions to *be gods*. Jehovah had designed man *in His likeness*, that is, to be dependent upon, totally obedient to, and thus protected by, his Creator. As you recall, man had a new tree problem, for there existed in the very center of Eden and in the very center of God's heart another tree. It was a tree created by God to give man the same kind of eternal existence God had—the ability to live forever. Should man *now eat from the tree of life*, He would impose upon mankind an eternal state of death in which his choice to be his own god would be final. And so, once again, a God of mercy and love and grace, *in the supreme act of protection*, erected the world's first security system. Man now found himself locked out of paradise. At this juncture God pronounced judgment for the first time on man.

We read about it in Genesis 3,

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:14-16)

God's judgment fell first of all upon Satan, which was where it belonged. He is the instigator of all evil. As an example of God's wrath, the serpent, whom Satan had indwelt, was lowered to the least position among all the animals. His legs were removed. He was assigned the role of the first "creepy-crawler" among mankind.

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Now, *every time you see a snake*, remember what he represents in the spiritual scheme of things. Don't become too attached to them; they are not appropriate pets. They are portraits of all evil in the world.

Next came God's prophetic judgment upon Satan himself in verses 15 and 16. Though Satan would bruise the seed of the woman, Jesus, God would ultimately crush Satan's head in total victory.

Then God turned his attention to the woman. She was given two basic sentences in addition to the spiritual death she brought upon herself by cutting herself off from God.

The first had to do with the issue of childbirth. God added the ingredient of pain to childbirth because *now the issuing forth of new life* meant the issuing forth of the sin nature. The second judgment upon the woman had to do with the structuring of the marriage relationship. Now that sin had entered the picture, man and woman could no longer exist in harmony without some kind of chain of authority. The woman was made to submit to the man, not because she was inferior, but because sin necessitated the development of roles to prevent total chaos. It forever has been, and forever shall be, one of Satan's great goals to make the marriage roles indistinguishable and to belittle the structure of authority within the home. The reason is found in this passage. These roles were God's solution to the chaos of the curse and only became necessary because Eve had stopped and listened to the voice of the enemy.

Now Adam approaches the judge's bench. His sentence is next.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field;

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.

(Genesis 3:17-19)

Adam's problem was clearly defined: He had listened to

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his wife instead of to God, and simply because she said it was okay, he knowingly violated the Word of God. He had rejected an absolute. God's sentence for Adam was just as clearly defined. He made work out of work. That's right. From that moment on, work, the natural act of doing in life what God assigns to you, would now carry with it all of the conflicts associated with the curse. The ground would not naturally blossom forth with fruit. No longer would God do the planting and man the tending, but man would have to till the soil, plant the seed, and fight the daily battles with thorns and thistles before a crop would force its way through the sod and meet the needs of the one who planted.

The very act of providing food for his family would now require the sweat of Adam's brow. His vocation would involve spiritual warfare, and so does yours and mine. So every time you encounter conflicts on the job or seemingly insurmountable obstacles, go outside and take a look at a tree. Be reminded that it is a battle between Satan and God. Don't get angry at your boss; get angry at the devil, surrender to the will of God, and be reminded that *because man chose to eat forbidden fruit*, man has to live with infested soil. From that point until Jesus comes again, work on planet earth will be just that—work. Those who tell you otherwise are confusing the world's principles with God's. Man was instructed to labor with his hands by the sweat of his brow for God's glory and for man's good, and all because of that one choice involving a tree.

Now a loving God takes the necessary precautions to protect man from himself. He sends for a moving van, moves Adam and his bride out of paradise, and locks the door to Eden, lest the dissatisfied couple try to sneak back in. Then He throws away the key, and the best armed guards ever to stand sentry duty were placed at the city gates, just in case our errant couple got any bright ideas. The story continues.

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

And the LORD God said, behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.

Therefore, the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of

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Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

(Genesis 3:20-24)

At this point man had cut himself off from everything in life that was beautiful. His unbroken fellowship with God was shattered; the sweetness of his work had turned to bitter struggle; and soon the relationships between the natural fruit of the woman's womb would bear the marks of enmity, and then the marks of death. Pain entered planet earth. Childbirth turned to labor and struggle, and woman found herself on a totally new plateau, under the authority of the one from whose side she came. The earth would now be characterized by warfare, even among the animals themselves. The ground would not yield its harvest willingly, but would have to be coaxed, and nurtured, and treated, and then only *sometimes, when God willed it*, would the harvest be glorious. All of life began to sing in the minor key.

Mankind, so marvelously created to mirror the likeness of a holy God, degenerated into every conceivable kind of immorality and depravity. Every child born to woman from that day forward inherited a natural sin nature that, whenever left to itself, would create its own god and defy the magnificent order and plan of the One who created it all. Sin had entered the world and death by sin, even as God had warned it would. Man had been thrust out of that garden of beautiful trees, lest he now eat of the one tree which would make him eternal and thus guarantee him eternal death.

There was now a crisis at the city gate. The way to Eden was no longer to be taken for granted. The holiness of God encompassed its entrance until no one could pass through unless Someone supernaturally provided a way.

MERCY AT THE HAND OF GOD

What a God of mercy we have! For the very moment man discarded His protection and rejected His authority, God began to lovingly create a way of escape. It was not the will of God that any should perish. So God, who had closed the gates to Eden to keep man from eating of the Tree of Life, began to carve on the foundations of planet earth His marvelous plan *to give the Tree of Life to man*. It was a plan so magnificent that, at the very mention

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of it, the angels folded their wings in awe. It was a plan so filled with God's power that it carried with it a bona fide guarantee that sealed Satan's fate once and for all.

God was going to make a new way back to The Tree of Life. He was going to create a way for man to pass through the gates of God's holiness back into paradise. He was going to guarantee that one day all those who came back to The Tree of Life would, indeed, live forever, once more in harmony with who God is. And the entire process would be tied, if you will, to the message of the tree.

Death had entered the world by means of the curse. Now there would be bloodshed, grief, war, and greed. Now there would be anger, jealousy, selfishness, and revenge. Each man, having now become his own god, would set about to defend his own kingdom. Unless God somehow made a way back into that garden, *back to that tree*, all hope was gone. So the years began to reveal, and God began to unfold a plan to redeem man, and recapture for man eternal life in the presence of God.

The first thing God did was to kill an animal and make for Adam and Eve *coverings* symbolizing the covering that would one day provide atonement for the sins of the whole world. An animal was killed because "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). God introduced animal sacrifices as a demonstration of what the blood of a perfect Lamb, slain before the foundation of the world, would one day do. He introduced the law to reveal the depths of man's sins, so that man's need, which was being ignored by a heart that was deceitful above all things, could not be ignored.

Through it all, He began to pave the way for the day when the Tree of Life would once again be available for the heart of man to feed upon, without the aftertaste of eternal death. In the meantime, the tree, once the symbol of life, became temporarily the symbol of death, to signify *how* God would pay the price. The tree became an executioner's tool to reveal judgment and demonstrate the wrath of God. That's why we read in Deuteronomy 21 these words:

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree; His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day: (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God

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giveth thee for an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:22,23)

The death penalty was to be God's restraint in a world filled by now with the fruits of sin. It was not because God *desired to*, but because man, having become his own god, had devised rules of behavior that trampled God's absolutes. Unless something protected man from himself, he would totally destroy himself. But a better way was coming. In anticipation of that better way, God designed a form of execution to illustrate both the sinfulness of man and the grace of God.

He took the tree, the epitome of His creation in nature—that which had been designed to signify life—and allowed it to become a tool upon which He demonstrated the fruits of the curse, making it instead an instrument of death. And so it was in Genesis 40 when Joseph was interpreting the chief baker's dream in prison. This was to be the baker's fortune:

This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days,

Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall *hang thee on a tree.* (Genesis 40:18b,19b)

In Joshua, chapter eight, at the destruction of Ai, we read:

And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap forever, even a desolation unto this day.

And the king of Ai, *he hanged on a tree* until eventide.
(Joshua 8:28,29a)

In chapter 10 of Joshua, on that fateful day when the sun stood still, and God delivered the five enemy kings into Joshua's hand, we read:

And Joshua said unto them, "Fear not, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage; for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight."

And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening.
(Joshua 10:25,26)

So the tree had become the gallows upon which those who were accursed would be executed. The wrath of God had to be demonstrated, and once again, God chose the tree *for a reason*. Man's fall was at the hand of the tree. Death had come into the world by way of man's eating the fruit of the tree. Thus, anyone executed by hanging was a symbol of the curse and "cursed was

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the one who was hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

Man had no way back to the Tree of Life, for the glory of God stood at the portals of the garden, and, unless man was sinless, he could not pass through. No one could because,

...all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

(Romans 3:23)

There is none righteous, no not one.

(Romans 3:10b)

Unless the curse of death was removed, no man could ever touch the tree of life again. One man had plunged the world into darkness. Unless someone sinless took away the curse, the way into the garden would be eternally sealed.

Praise God, however, it happened!

He who knew no sin, became sin for us...

(II Corinthians 5:21a paraphrase)

or as Paul wrote in Galatians,

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law. Being made a curse for us; for it is written, ‘cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree’.

(Galatians 3:13)

So the cross became a synonym for the tree. Thus Peter wrote:

Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed.a

(I Peter 2:24)

The tree, God’s ultimate executioner, once again became an instrument of deliverance. The price was paid, and God had made a way back to the Tree of Life.

The wonderful truth was that once your sins have been atoned for and the curse removed, you are free to enter again through the glory of God into the garden of God where you can eat of the Tree of Life and live forever, free from sin and free from guilt. In Revelation chapter 2, John wrote these words:

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life; which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

(Revelation 2:7)

The way had been made; the curse had been removed, and access to eternal life is ours once again. And all because “He who knew no sin became sin for us.” That, Beloved, is why the cross stands at the center of the gospel. It is THE WAY back to

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the Father. Jesus hung on a tree so you could partake of a tree that would allow you to live in the presence of His Father forever. Religions of all types and persuasions will talk to you about a tree of life. They will tell you a god of love wants you to live forever. What they won't tell you is, that *should you eat of that tree without having the curse removed*, you will die in your sins and live forever in an eternal hell.

A cross-less theology is the lie of lies. Sin *must* be atoned for. The price must be paid. Neither you nor I nor anyone we know can pay that price. We are accursed by our sins. Unless someone sinless takes away that curse by hanging on a tree, you are destined to an eternal death. The cross is not just an Easter story. The cross is the heart of God poured out to man in total, unselfish, agape love. You and I had best return to teaching, preaching, witnessing, living a life that shouts to the world, the cross, the cross, the cross. God paid the price upon a tree for life to be given to you and to me.

If you are reading this book and have never really been to the foot of that cross and realized that *you* nailed God to that tree, you have missed the essence of Christianity, and you are lost in your sins. Until you come to that tree and see yourself as you are—wretched, sinful, and unworthy—and allow Jesus to bear the curse for you, the tree of life will only hold for you eternal death.

I beseech you, Beloved, in the name of the Living God, to come to the cross of Jesus Christ today; to bow down in deep humility and ask the Lord Jesus Christ, who bore your sins on that tree, to purge you and cleanse you and save you. Tell Him you want eternal life; but you understand that unless the curse has been removed, there simply is no way to receive it.

Ask the One who paid the price for your sins to forgive you and make you whole. In that moment God will, in one sweeping motion, cover your sins with His blood, and the gates of His glory will open to you allowing you to partake of that beautiful tree. He will suddenly look at you through the blood of His Son, and you will be pure. He will feed you the fruit of eternity, and *from that moment on*, you will be sealed by His Spirit forever, and you will one day be present when God writes the final chapter in the story of the tree. In Revelation 22 we read like this,

And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as

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crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And there shall be no more curse... (Revelation 22:1-3a)

No more curse! No more pain! No more sin!

It will mean an eternity in the presence of the Living God worshipping Him, praising Him, loving Him, serving Him. It will mean an eternity, spent by that precious river, pure as crystal—a river that flows beside and through the most beautiful tree ever planted on planet earth.

We shall live forever! He shall reign forever!

And the message of the tree will be complete.

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A Challenge to Further Study and Application

1- Had God not banished man from the garden, what would have happened to mankind?

2- What did God mean in Genesis 3:14 when He said, “Because thou hast done this”? Who was He talking to? What was his punishment to be? What, then, should the “spiritual switch” be whenever we see a snake?

3- What two penalties were promised Eve? What were the spiritual truths hidden in those penalties?

4- What personal application can you make of Genesis 3:17,18? What does it mean to you personally?

5- How did God make the way for us back to the Tree of Life? What was the progression of it? Why do you think God used the tree as a means of death? What was He symbolizing?

6- What does Revelation 22:1-3 promise us? How does this make the story of the tree complete?

7- With these truths in mind, what kind of remembrances can you create that will help you fall on your face before God in worship and praise *every time you see a tree*? How can these truths help you better teach or explain the gospel to others?

Memorize: Revelation 22:1-3

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