

September 15-19, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 193

Jesus Came To Bring Fire? (conclusion)

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: Last week we began our year long journey through the entire Bible by looking at Creation... God's greatest dream. He dreamed of a community or family that He could share life with. And when He was all done it was perfect. God's perfect dream. But now we begin with mankind's uncanny ability to destroy God's dream and what God did about that.

I hope as we go through this series is that you will start to understand that the Bible is not a collection of unrelated stories each with its own little moral about how you should live your life. But instead that it is primarily one story about what went wrong with the human race and how God relentlessly pursued a plan put it back right. And so that brings us to this week's installment of God's story- Adam & Eve's fall from grace. If you recall when we last left Adam & Eve (last week as God's work creating the universe was finished up) everything was perfect. But it wouldn't stay perfect for long. Here's what we know:

In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:9 (NLT)

After placing these two trees in the garden God tells Adam & Eve to eat as much of the fruit from the tree of life as they want but He also tells them that the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is like poison- God tells His children to stay away from it. He tells them that on the day they eat that fruit they will die.

And so Adam & Eve start living their lives. We don't know how long it takes for them to mess up (who knows... it could have been millions of years or it could have been a matter of hours. I suspect it was closer to hours than millions of years but that's just a guess) but we do know they mess up. Eve is tempted by the serpent. She decides she knows better than God what will make her happy (the most basic definition of sin I know of- that we think we know better than God and so we do what we know God has asked us not to do because we're so smart) and she eats the fruit. Then she turns to Adam and hands him the fruit and he eats it.

Now I want to pause just a moment here. Eve gets a lot of bad press for being the first one to sin. I used to think pretty poorly of her. But I never realized Adam was standing right next to her when all this happened. It wasn't until I saw a movie about the Bible and they showed Adam standing there listening to Eve talk with the serpent that it clicked- Adam didn't do anything to stop her. He just stood there and let her disobey their Father. Adam is just as much to blame as Eve is in this. And at least Eve took some persuading- not Adam. Eve eats it, hands it to Adam and without a word (at least that we know of)- CHOMP! Way to go, Adam.

Anyways... as soon as they eat the fruit shame and guilt and regret and fear and anxiety and worry enter the world for the first time. And then because of their shame they sew together fig leaves to cover their nakedness and they hide from God. This event makes all human beings hiders (because all humans are sinners). But thankfully God is a seeker. He comes into the garden of Eden and He pursues Adam & Eve. What follows is a picture of love- God doesn't protect them from all of the consequences of their sin but He does begin a series of events that would allow Him to redeem them. To buy them back. To heal the fatal sickness that they had released into this world- sin. Max Lucado says that as soon as Adam & Eve bit into the forbidden fruit it's as though a cross-shaped-shadow appeared on the horizon and

everything from that moment marched toward one inevitable event- God's Son dying on a cross.

Tuesday Reflection: Have you thought much about the world we live in? Have you watched the news lately? It doesn't take very long to look around right now and realize just how messed up human beings are. So many atrocities so many horrors in this world that we bring upon ourselves. Philosophers have been trying to figure out why these things happen for thousands of years and yet all you have to do is look at Genesis chapters 3 & 4 to see what is at the root of all of it. We think we know better than God how to run our lives. It is what was at the heart of the original sin (Adam & Eve eating the forbidden fruit) and it's what's at the core of every mistake and atrocity and horror in human history. It's what is at the heart of Jesus dying on the cross. He came to turn the tables on the death unleashed by Adam & Eve all those years before in the garden of Eden. And that leads to another thought- have you ever spent much time thinking about the concept of "death"? Think about what God said about the trees He placed in the center of the garden:

The Lord God commanded him, "You may eat the fruit from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat the fruit from the tree which gives the knowledge of good and evil. If you ever eat fruit from that tree, you will die!" Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT)

I remember thinking about this story when I was pretty little. I was in Sunday school and our teacher was telling the story of Adam & Eve with flannel graphs (if you never had the pleasure of witnessing a "flannel graph" story it was cut out pieces of flannel fabric with the pictures of the characters from the story printed on them that when placed on another larger piece of flannel with a scene or background on it could be used to illustrate the story). I remember being shocked when I heard that if they ate the fruit they would "die". I remember being more shocked when they decided eating the forbidden fruit was somehow worth the risk of "dying". And I remember being even more shocked when they ate the fruit and didn't immediately drop dead.

What did that mean? Why didn't they drop dead? I decided God was a lot like those parents who used hyperbole to try to keep their kids under control. If you make an ugly face at someone your face will freeze and you'll walk through life with that look perpetually on your face. You have a big bug up your nose and if you pick your nose it will bite your finger off (I know a parent who used this one). If you cut your legs off with the lawnmower doing something I told you not to don't come running to me crying about it (that last one I made up but it is funny...).

I figured God was like that. Don't eat that fruit or you'll DIE!!!!!! And then they didn't die. Or did they? What is death? What is life? What happened when they ate the forbidden fruit? One thing we can know for sure is that as soon as they chose to go their own way and reject God's way they died a spiritual death. They were separated from God and they began a slow but inevitable process of physical death as soon as they were cut off from the tree of life. They had chosen darkness over light. They had chosen death. And they handed down that legacy to every human being who would ever come after them:

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. Romans 5:12 (NLT)

And God had to evict Adam & Eve from the garden of Eden where the tree of life resided. Why? Because He couldn't allow His children to live within this world that had been infected by sin and death forever. It would be too much for us. I LOVE the explanation that the Jesus Storybook Bible gives:

And terrible pain came into God's heart. His children hadn't just broken the one rule; they had broken God's heart. They had broken their wonderful relationship with him. And now he knew everything else would break. God's creation would start to unravel, and come undone, and go wrong. From now on everything would die — even though it was all supposed to last forever.

You see, sin had come into God's perfect world. And it would never leave. God's children would be always running away from him and hiding in the dark. Their hearts would break now, and never work properly again. God couldn't let his children live forever, not in such pain, not without him. There was only one way to protect them. "You will have to leave the garden now," God told his children, his eyes filling with tears. "This is no longer your true home, it's not the place for you anymore." But before they left the garden, God made clothes for his children, to cover them. He gently clothed them and then he sent them away on a long, long journey — out of the garden, out of their home. Well, in another story, it would all be over and that would have been. . . The End...

But not in this Story. God loved his children too much to let the story end there. Even though he knew he would suffer, God had a plan — a magnificent dream. One day, he would get his children back. One day, he would make the world their perfect home again. And one day, he would wipe away every tear from their eyes. You see, no matter what, in spite of everything, God would love his children — with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love. And though they would forget him, and run from him, deep in their hearts, God's children would miss him always, and long for him — lost children yearning for their home. Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: "It will not always be so! I will come to rescue you! And when I do, I'm going to do battle against the snake. I'll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I'm coming back for you!" And he would. One day, God himself would come.

Wednesday Reflection: The story of the (successful) temptation and deceiving of Adam & Eve is one that we would all do well to understand. Because it is a text book case of how the devil (a name which literally means "deceiver") convinces us that we know better than God how to run our own lives. Any good temptation will contain three basic components- a sneer, a lie and a joke. Let's start off talking about the sneer:

One day (the devil) asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" Genesis 3:1 (NLT)

What is the devil doing here? I used to think he was trying to convince Eve that God hadn't really said that at all. That God didn't care if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That it was all a big mistake. That's what I used to think. And I could see how I (and maybe you) would think that until we get to the second part of this text book temptation-

the lie (we'll look at that tomorrow but the lie makes it obvious the devil isn't trying to claim God didn't forbid the fruit).

So if asking Eve if God has REALLY said they must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden wasn't about trying to convince her that God hadn't really said it then what was he doing?

He was sneering at God's advice. Not questioning whether God had said it but sneering at why God would ever say such a thing at all. It is what's at the heart of every successful temptation on earth. Did God REALLY say that?!?!?! You're kidding me! That's crazy! Why would He care about something as ridiculous as eating a piece of fruit?!?!?! It was at the heart of what tripped up Adam & Eve and it is what's at the heart of what trips up you and me. Did God REALLY say that?!?!?

Did God REALLY say that sexual intimacy was something to only be engaged in within the covenant relationship of marriage?!?!?!?! It's one of the devil's most successful sneers in this day and age. Did God REALLY say I shouldn't cheat on my taxes?!?!?!? That's just crazy... it's the government I'm cheating here. They cheat me so this is just fair play. Did God REALLY say I shouldn't lie?!?!?!?! That's just crazy. I mean, nobody should ever lie to me but sometimes I need to lie to protect other people's feelings or to get things that I wouldn't get if I told the truth or to keep myself from getting into trouble.

Did God REALLY say that? You can hear the sneer behind it if you listen really closely. This attack hits us hardest in the heart. It makes us feel silly if we take God's directions seriously. It is truly at the heart of our culture's attack on faith (and I'm not one to withdraw from our culture but it doesn't take much to look around and realize that many of the TV shows and movies we watch make the devil's pitch for him... you are saving yourself for marriage????? What's wrong with you? I mean I know that's what the Bible says but come on... did God REALLY say that?????). This attack hits us squarely in the heart. It softens us up for the second component of temptation which we'll deal with tomorrow but for today maybe spend a few minutes thinking about this verse from the Proverbs:

Be careful what you think because your thoughts run your life. Proverbs 4:23 (NCV)

It is the devil's job to try to change the way you think and he does that first and foremost with a sneer. It is the devil's job to try to change the way you think and he does that first and foremost with a sneer. So often we lose our way not because of a well articulated argument but because of an atmosphere of sheepishness over something we know God said that is called into question by a sneer. Can you see the sneers that are directed at your life? Eve fell for it- will you?

Thursday Reflection: The second component of the devil's temptation of Eve is a lie. You'll notice he doesn't start off the temptation with a lie. First he has to soften his target up by making them feel silly for listening to the obviously ridiculous advice that God gives. Then Comes the lie:

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
Genesis 3:4-5 (NLT)

The devil doesn't deny that God said to stay away from the forbidden fruit. He just casts doubt on why God would say such a thing and then he drops the lie. And as any good lie there is just enough truth in it to trip us up if we're not careful. First off the devil tells Eve that she won't die (which we'll see is kind of true...) and then he tells her that her eyes will be opened (which is also kind of true). I don't know if this lie would have worked if the devil hadn't first softened her up with the sneer. She falls for the temptation to play God. To put herself in the place that only our Creator should occupy. It is the oldest temptation in the book and it is the one that still works to this very day on all of Adam & Eve's descendants.

And so she eats the fruit and gives some to Adam who also eats it and what happens? First off- they don't die. At least not the kind of drop-dead-and-fall-over-as-soon-as-you-eat-it kind of dead. But they do die spiritually. I wonder what that looked like. Have you ever seen the movie about Noah that had Russell Crowe in it? It had a lot of really controversial things in it that made a lot of people really mad but I could tell as I watched it that the writer and director had spent a lot of time thinking about what creation might have been like and what it might have looked like before Adam & Eve ate the forbidden fruit and what it might have looked like in the aftermath. In the movie Adam & Eve are beings of light before they eat the fruit and it's only after they've eaten that they come to look the way we look today. Like what we consider to be typical humans. I never thought about it like that before. I still don't know for sure if the Noah movie's depiction of that particular idea was accurate or not but it did make me think- the Bible says when we die our resurrection bodies will be glorified and redeemed and we will be "like Him". What does that mean? I don't know for sure but I'm wondering now if maybe we weren't "like Him" before the forbidden fruit was eaten and after we were... well... the way we are now.

No... we didn't die immediately the way I always thought about death but we did die in a way I still am not sure I can understand. I think Eve probably recognized that God was right immediately. And then there was the other lie- your eyes will be opened and you will be like God. And when they ate the fruit their eyes were indeed opened- they just didn't like what they saw:

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. Genesis 3:7 (NLT)

Suddenly they were able to see things they had never seen before. Why? Because of some change in their minds? Possibly. Or maybe it was the change in their bodies? Probably it was a combination of both. But whatever the reason for the transformation in their vision we know this- they didn't like what they saw. They didn't like being naked so they patched together some fig leaves to cover their shame.

We still do this to this very day. We believe the lie that God doesn't have our best at heart. That when he tells us to stay away from something it must be because He doesn't want us to have the joy and satisfaction that doing it/getting it will bring us. We doubt the goodness of God. And so often when we reach out and take what we know God has told us to avoid we

are filled with shame just as Adam and Eve were. So what do we do? We patch together a sort of proverbial fig leaf suit to cover our "nakedness". We fill our lives with work to achieve more success or power or money and in so doing destroy the very things we claim to be working so hard for (family, relationships, health, sanity...). It happens all the time. Why does it happen? We believe the lie. We believe we'll only be happy when we've achieved whatever it is we are dead set on achieving even if we know that the way we are trying to achieve it is contrary to the way God would have us proceed. It happens to us just like it happened to Adam & Eve and if we're not careful it will consume our lives.

Friday Reflection: So the temptation of Adam & Eve started with a sneer, it then proceeded with a lie and it ended with a joke. In general, jokes fall into one of two categories- jokes that are funny to everybody and jokes that are only funny to the one making the joke and not to the person that the joke is "on". This particular joke in Genesis chapter 3 is one where the devil is left laughing and Adam & Eve are left crying. It's really more of a prank when you get right down to it:

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. Genesis 3:7 (NLT)

What's so funny about that? That the devil told her exactly what would happen (you won't "die" and you'll see like God sees) and he was telling the truth on both counts- they were just working off of different definitions of "die" and having vision "like God". They got both of the things the devil promised but the result was very different from what Adam & Eve expected.

Now I don't know what the devil thought would happen after this. What would God do? Would he destroy His children? Would He cut them off? Nobody knows that the devil thought but I guarantee you he didn't think that what actually happened was going to happen. I grew up thinking God cursed everybody involved. I thought He cursed the serpent, the woman and the man.

But He didn't.

He did curse the serpent. But to the woman and the man He only explained what the consequences of their actions would be. She would have pain in child birth and a REALLY complicated relationship with her husband. He would have a REALLY tough time working the land to survive. Why? Because the curse that should rightfully have fallen on Adam & Eve falls upon the earth instead. God would never curse His kids. Not only do I imagine that this was an unexpected turn of events for the devil but then God drops this little bomb:

I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your descendants and her descendants will be enemies. One of her descendants will crush your head, and you will bite his heel. Genesis 3:15 (NLT)

This is the first prophecy in the Bible and it points right at Jesus. God tells the serpent that one day the descendant of the woman would be injured by the serpent but in the very act of injuring this "descendant" the serpent's head would be crushed. And then God in mercy and love evicts Adam & Eve from the garden but before He does we are told that He does something that is so compassionate and caring it almost staggers the imagination:

And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife. Genesis 3:21 (NLT)

I imagine it was the nicest set of clothes they would ever own. I wonder if they ever wore out? We will never know for sure but I know this- God covered their shame by sacrificing an animal to make clothes that would cover their nakedness. What kind of animal was it? We don't know but I'd like to think it was a lamb. And that every time they wore those clothes that God had provided them with they were reminded of the consequences of sin. God covered their shame even as He allowed them to deal with the consequences of their actions and in so doing pointed us once again to Jesus- a descendant of the woman Who would one day come to this earth and in a similar act of sacrifice would provide a much more permanent covering for our shame than mere clothes could ever provide.

When Jesus would finally come to this earth He would deal with all three of these components of temptation- the sneer, the lie and the joke.

When Adam & Eve gave in to temptation they were in a garden. On the day before Jesus would deal with a tree of His own (the Bible often refers to the cross and a "tree" of death) He was in a garden too. The garden of Gethsemane. In Eden, Adam and Eve's hearts were swayed by the sneer of the devil- did God REALLY say you couldn't have that fruit?!?! But in Gethsemane Jesus wasn't swayed by the devil's sneers. He may not have wanted to go to that tree of death (the cross) but He never wavered in His belief that God was right about what needed to happen.

In Eden Adam & Eve believed the lie that God was stingy and didn't want them to have what would make them happy. But in Gethsemane Jesus wouldn't buy it for a second. He knew that God's path was always the most generous, the most beautiful and the most satisfying- even if it didn't look like it. Jesus trusted His Father and that trust changed everything. His obedience changed the world and not just that- it changed my life and yours. And that obedience is staggering when you think about it. In Eden, God said to Adam & Eve, "obey me about the tree and you'll live" and they didn't. In Gethsemane God said to Jesus, "obey Me about the tree of death and You will be crushed and cut off from the land of the living" and Jesus obeyed.

And so Jesus allowed Himself to be hung from that cross in so doing He turned the tree of death into THE TREE OF LIFE. And do you know what happened? Suddenly, the joke was on the devil. I mean think about it- the devil thinks that he's defeated God and God's children with the tree in Eden. God then sends Jesus to this earth and with another tree (the cross) Jesus deals the death blow to the power of hell and death. It's comical when you think about it. And it's the only time that one of God's jokes is of the type that leaves one person crying. Every other joke of God's is of the type that leaves everyone laughing.

For instance- the fact that I, Ed Gardner, am considered to be one of His children. That I get to be a disciple of God's Son Jesus is nothing short of comical. I hear the devil's arguments almost everyday. "Who do you think you are? You think you deserve what God offers? You think you're good enough. Don't you remember..."

Yes... I do remember. But when the devil reminds me of my past I do my best to remind myself of the joke that Jesus played on the cross. A joke that left the devil and all of his minions crying and left anyone who will trust Him with their lives laughing at the absurdity

that God would send His Son to die so that I could be spared the consequences of the prank of Eden. Spend some time today thinking about the way the apostle Paul put it:

God brought you alive-right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets. Colossians 2:13-15 (MES)

My sins nailed to that tree- oh how that must have made the devil feel? "You beat me with a tree?!?!?!? How could I not have seen that coming?!?!?!" Then with that same tree Jesus showed the spiritual forces of darkness that the joke was on them.

Now you tell me that God doesn't have a sense of humor...