Praise be to our God and Father through our Lord Jesus Christ

When Joshua led the army of Israel against Jericho, the people did as the LORD had commanded them.

*They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.*

Joshua 6:21

Although this somehow seems harsh to us, this is exactly what God commanded. And the reason was that the people of this land had turned completely from God. They practiced all manner of abominations until they were past any possibility of redemption. God is merciful but His patience is not unlimited. Once they passed all opportunity to repent, God removed the sin from His sight.

If we look at this from God’s point of view, it is not harsh. His character is absolutely pure and holy: He will not tolerate sin. In fact, we see God’s great mercy in that He gave them such a long time to repent, instead of wiping them out immediately.

This account of the battle of Jericho is far more than ancient history. It is God demonstrating to us how we are to deal with sin in our own lives. Our sins are holed up inside us in a fortress. Our only access to conquer that fort is by divine intervention from God; and that is through Jesus Christ. Once we have access, we are to be absolutely merciless to sin: we must kill it. We can’t keep the little ones or the ones that happen to be our favorite; we can’t let the ones go that don’t seem to hurt anyone. We must kill every bit of sin that moves.

The difference is that while the battle of Jericho was over in a day, our battle is lifelong: but we are called to endure, and we are given strength.

In Christ’s love

John

1-30-22

Genesis 2:4-25 (3)

God planted a garden in the eastern section of an area called Eden. The garden had shrubs and plants of the field. The LORD God caused all kinds of trees to grow in His garden; trees that were not only beautiful to look at, but bore fruit of all kinds. There was no lack of variety in what He created; just consider what the earth brings forth now in the fruits and nuts we gather from trees and imagine what it must have been before everything was cursed.

This garden had a huge river flowing through it; so big that it was able to branch into four rivers. All manner of animal life moved through the garden with no fear of the man and woman; they in turn, had no fear of them. It was into this beautiful garden that the LORD God placed the man whom He had created. It was in this garden that God took a rib from Adam and out of it created Eve. Adam already had fellowship with God and lived in this paradise of God’s creation; yet it was God’s gift of the woman that delighted Adam. She was the solution for his aloneness; the answer to the one thing in creation that was not good.

And so, on the sixth day, God created marriage. The joining of a man and a woman in lifelong covenant with each other and with God.

God planted a tree in the garden called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In His infinite wisdom, He placed the tree within reach of the man and woman but commanded that they not eat from it. God is a covenant God; He keeps His promises; and covenants demonstrate His faithfulness and bring Him glory. Because God is perfectly faithful, He can demand complete obedience to His commands; and God does want obedience.

If the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had not been there, Adam would not have been able to disobey. There would have been no evidence of Adam’s obedience. God planted the tree to test Adam’s willingness to live out God’s command.

In the book of James, we see a similarity with faith. He tells us in 2:17, “*Even so faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself*.” Our salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ and not of works, but the works prove our faith. True faith in Christ will lead to good works. Similarly, Adam’s true obedience to God would have been demonstrated by him resisting the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; apparently a knowledge that should have belonged to God alone.

God has not changed. He is still a covenant God and we who are Christians are in covenant with Him. Our covenant is that Jesus paid the price for all our sins; in return, we believe in Him and the sufficiency of His atonement. As you can see, God really isn’t gaining anything from this arrangement, which is why it’s a covenant of grace. Even though we are now under a covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, He still requires our obedience.

Jesus clarified this in John 14:15, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*.” He helped us immensely by summing up the law with loving God and loving our neighbor; but the commands given by God in the Bible tell us how to do this. Because following God’s law is so contrary to our nature, He blesses us with the Holy Spirit, who gives us the ability to obey His commands. And with the Holy Spirit, as we read in 1 John 5:3, “*we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome*.”

We don’t know all the reason for God putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, but part of the reason was for Adam to demonstrate his obedience; a chance for him to uphold his end of the covenant. Like Adam, we also have that opportunity.

God also planted another tree in the garden; the tree of life. Once more, we don’t know all of what God had in mind, but the Bible clearly lets us know that He knew exactly what He was doing and we can know that His reasons for planting it were perfect.

Adam and Eve were allowed to eat from the tree of life any time they wanted. To eat from this tree would give them physical life forever. Again, we wonder why the tree was there. Adam and Eve were created to live forever. There was nothing in God’s creation that was going to kill them. In one sense, death didn’t even exist because death is brought about by sin and there was no sin in Adam and Eve. It appears there was no need for the tree of life.

Once they did sin and death entered the world, Adam and Eve were barred from the tree of life. So, why was it there? While we will have to wait until we are in the presence of God to know the full reason, we do know a little. The tree of life was a promise; the tree of life was a prophecy. While Adam and Eve remained in the garden, they didn’t need the tree of life. But once death and sin entered the world, we would all need that tree.

But the use of the tree is tricky. It has to be under the control of our wise God. When we get into chapter 3 of Genesis, we will look into the mercy of God that kept the tree out of reach of the people. But under God’s guidance, the tree of life is made available to us all. The tree of life still exists. The prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John both experienced visions of the tree of life in the new havens and new earth. But more importantly, the tree of life is the promise of Jesus Christ.

As we’ve mentioned before, God knew long before He began creation that human-beings would fall. He knew that we would break the covenants He made and rebel against Him. We’ve also considered that long before He began creation, He already had a plan to redeem us from falling away from Him. It was a plan that would cost Him dearly, but it was the only way for Him to maintain His character of mercy and justice.

The tree of life in the garden was the prophecy of that redemption. Even though mankind didn’t get to eat of it then, God would give the opportunity later at the prefect time. That is part of the significance of partaking of the body and blood of Christ in communion; we are eating the fruit of the tree of life.

The tree of life in the garden was a promise. It was a promise by God to provide eternal life. Again, this promise is kept in Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy and the promise. He provides us with eternal life but He also removes the curse of sin. Because of this, our eternal life will be in renewed glorified bodies, and in the presence of the Father.

While Jesus is certainly our tree of life, the tree in the garden is not metaphorical; it is a real tree with real fruit and real life giving properties. The Bible lets us know that Christians will one day be able to eat from the tree of life and the new creation will benefit from it. Although from slightly different angles with slightly different focus, the tree of life shows up again in the new creation. It grows next to a river of life that flows from God’s throne.

Ezekiel 47:12

*By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.*

Revelation 22:2

*On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

We who follow Christ, will get to see the tree of life. It has grown; it has multiplied into several trees and it rotates through a variety of fruits. Its roots no longer draw from the pristine water of the great river that flowed through Eden, but they draw from the river of life that will flow from the throne of God in the new creation.

The fruit will be an eternal source of food for us and we will be allowed to eat; the way will not be barred for us. Somehow, the leaves of the tree will provide healing. This is probably not a physical healing because they are for the nations. It appears that they will somehow be used to bring about the peace that will last for eternity. This remains a mystery for us, but we will learn the answer in due time.

This is one of the many undeserved gifts we will receive by the work of Jesus on the cross. Regardless of the events of our life here, we need to keep focused on what He has in store for us. It is so easy for us to develop tunnel vision such that we only see the here and now. Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, that we may look to eternity. Eternity should have an impact on the decisions we make and the actions we take each and every day.

It is a good exercise for all of us to check ourselves; to make sure of our salvation. Our salvation comes from Jesus Christ alone; it is by faith in Him that we are saved. But there ought to be evidence of this belief in our lives. The Bible lists these evidences as things like brotherly kindness, self-control, perseverance, and godliness. The apostle Peter warns us in 2 Peter 1:10, “*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble*.”

What is being said there? Take an honest look at yourself to see if these qualities exist, or are at least trying to exist. Honestly consider whether or not decisions made in everyday life take eternity into account. If the answer is no, now is the time to find out. If the answer is no, cry out to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to repent and to turn your life around. Jesus is the tree of life; He desires that all would come to Him to eat; He will turn no one away who comes to Him.

The first two chapters of Genesis give an account of God’s creation of all that is in the heavens and the earth. They let us know that God began by creating out of nothing and even used what He had created to create more. All that God created was very good. He created the physical and the spiritual; He created things that had life; He created mankind in His own image and likeness. God created relationships such as dominion, covenants, and marriage. God created foreshadowing, because He knew what was coming. The first two chapters of the Bible tell us of all these things, and then, all the rest of the Bible reveals God’s plan of redemption for His wayward creation.

The last verse of this beautiful and touching account of creation is, “*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed*.” This has nothing to do with them being really good looking or having no physical imperfections. This has to do with them having nothing to hide. There was no sin for them to fear being exposed. They could be completely open, with no dark secrets to keep from anyone else. They could be comfortable naked: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually; there was no need to cover any part of their lives. What is more, because of their sinlessness, they could stand before God.

None of us can stand unashamed before anyone anymore; certainly not before God. The Bible is the story of God’s revealed plan for our redemption. The offer is open to anyone; but not everyone will take it. Those of us who do fully accept salvation God’s way, will one day be able to stand before our Creator unashamed; made righteous in the blood of Christ.

Prayer

How beautiful is Your creation, LORD God; how much more wonderous are You who brought it into being. We cannot fathom Your love for us, in that You formed us having a plan already in place to atone for our rebellion against You; paying our debt for us; providing us an inheritance as if we had never sinned. You are truly awesome God, worthy of praise.

We know that by the blood of Jesus, we are cleansed of the filth and stain of sin, and we will be able to worship You for all eternity. We look forward to being in Your presence giving You praise. With perfect voices, we will join in with the angelic song that proclaims Your glory.

For now, Lord, we are living in this world and so often subject to the frailties of the flesh. We remember the prayer of our Saviour Jesus, that we not be taken out of this world for now. We know, therefore, that You have work for us to do. We also know that engaging in this work is an act of worship and will bring You glory. So, help us, we pray, to complete the tasks You have ordained for us, that You may be glorified in the earth and that we may be pleasing to You.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen