

Eastward in Eden
 Sermon 27
 04/21/24

In the beginning:

Genesis 2:7 “then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (dust-particles of the basic mineral elements or perhaps even from the quantum field)

8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there He put the man whom He had formed.

9 And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

To provide background to God’s mindset let’s begin with a look at the word “formed” in vs. 7. It isn’t asah, meaning to do or make as you might expect, but yatsar- to mold as a potter. It’s root means mind, conception or imagination.

Isa 26:

3 “You do keep him in perfect peace, whose imagination(yetsar) is stayed (rests) on You, because he trusts in You.”

Compare this to

Isa 64:

8 “Yet, O LORD, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou art our potter; we are all the work of Thy hand.”

This is profound in its assertion. O Lord is Yahweh God who is attested to as Father (abba); we are the clay and You are the potter (yatsar) and we are ALL the work (poetry) of Your hand.

The root of potter is the imagination from which we receive His perfect peace. We have been designed for peace, meaning oneness, in Him. Anything apart from it is not real but an illusion, a lie. God is our Father who has imagined and formed flesh around the unique poem that is you. That poem provides the words to the song that He sings over you! He now invites you to imagine the beauty of the paradise lost and now regained that is your life.

Zephaniah 3:

17 “...with His love, He calms all your fears. He rejoices over you with joyful song.”

We are not a mechanical product but a work of art which supports the idea of God’s rest on the seventh day. The masterpiece was complete and was “very good”. Not one more brushstroke nor even another breath.

Brian Simmons does a beautiful job of bringing out some of the truths in this sequence in Genesis in The Passion Translation.

In verse 7 “God forms Adam from the ground. Whereas everything else was spoken into existence by an act of speech, only man was sculpted by the hands of God.” We are a spirit being in an earthly body. The

name Adam correlates directly to the physical earth as the word for ground is adamah. Both referring to redness, the color of blood.

In John 9:

1 "As He passed by, He saw a man blind from his birth.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

6 As He said this, He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay,

7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am'. So he went and washed and came back seeing."

The same ground that Jesus had originally used to make the clay to form Adam He used to restore sight to the blind. This appears to be an amazing and unique miracle until we realize that He does it every day in the sight of the unborn. We exist undeniably in a world of the miraculous.

He breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life. To breathe into another's nostrils is what takes place when two people kiss. The dust of earth and the breath of deity mingled producing a living being that could interact in both the physical and spiritual realms. It illustrates the intimacy desired by God with His creation.

We see in

Song of Songs 1:

2 "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine..."

The breath of life is obviously the Holy Spirit but the word for kiss is both powerful and interesting. Its root means to catch fire or to burn, a reference to

Hebrews 12:

29 "for our God is a consuming fire."

The life of Christ who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, has always been with us for He is our preexistent Creator. He is the refining fire that removes from us all that is not perfect and complete. Every portion of Adam's being filled with life when the breath poured into him as he lay in his creator's arms. His first sight was looking into the eyes of his Maker. The Lord God had created a garden eastward in Eden and there He placed the man formed of dust.

Garden means an enclosed space, hedged about and protected. Eastward refers to that which was beforehand in the earliest sense, even before time and space. Eden simply means delightful pleasures, a place of beauty and rest. If we put these together, we can imagine a scene whereby God is infusing a part of Himself into the physical man through His kiss. The Beginning of all things is Christ, the Uncreated One, whose thoughts inhabit our hearts and minds with the pleasurable delight of love, joy and song. Therefore, the Garden of Eden existed inwardly and outwardly in man's origin. It was his world both within and without.

The Two Trees:

Gen 2:

9 "And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;
 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

It's not difficult to identify what the Tree of Life is. The early church clearly taught that it was the life of Christ. It, along with every other tree in the garden, was delightful and beautiful to behold, as well as good for nourishment, be it physical, spiritual or both. The only exception being the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

In John 6: Jesus says some things that shock the crowd.

53 "So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you;
 54 he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.
 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed."

This is the Eucharist and hearkens straight back to the garden and the fruit of the Tree of Life. His flesh is the pulp of the fruit and the blood is its juice. For He is the true vine and from Him flows its sap, even to the extent that He describes us as the branches that come forth in union yielding the fruit of life.

The fruit of the Tree of the KGE, on the other hand, produces fruit that is deadly. Let's examine this closely because first off God has nothing to do with evil so how is it that He has created a tree that produces it? Secondly, is God's command a threat of capital punishment? I thought He was all about life but it sounds as though He's willing to put them to death if they disobey Him.

Let's take the second question first. God never says He will punish, much less put to death, Adam and Eve. He's simply issuing a warning in love concerning the consequence of their action. We do the same with our own children about those things harmful or dangerous.

Back to the first question - does God create evil? In a word, no. Evil is that which man does within the darkness of a distorted identity, the result of sin. A distorted mind produces distorted behavior. So why is it there? Some believe that because of the wording of the verse the Tree of Life existed in the middle of the garden, however, the other tree is simply described as one that existed yet possibly not located in the garden's midst. The two trees were most likely metaphysical based on the properties of their respective fruit, therefore, the Tree of KGE may not even have subsisted within the garden. The couple may well have had to venture outside the garden, so to speak, in order to engage with it on a mystical level.

It is helpful to understand the meaning of the words for good and evil in Hebrew. Good means to function within its intended purpose. In Hebrew culture it is evidenced by the house or tabernacle being surrounded with grace, beauty, love, health and prosperity, otherwise known as the peace of shalom. Adam possessed functional discernment when he named the animals, an important event and the only example given of his behavior prior to the fall.

Evil is the word "ra" and essentially means to distort, pervert or twist that which is good. The word for shame in Greek reflects this idea for it means disfigurement. Thus, the more applicable definitions of the two words for good and evil are function and dysfunction. Evil is often defined as reversing the functional good. We see a powerful illustration of this in the word "lost". According to Strongs it means to be in the

process of perishing. It is ruination with full destructive results but it does not imply annihilation or extinction. This doesn't minimize its effects obviously since the very first offspring of Adam and Eve descends into murder and lying almost immediately. It appears as a permanent reversal to that which is good but that which God has spoken will stand forever, for He has renewed all things.

The word most often translated evil or wicked in Greek is *poneros*. It means a mindset marked by hardship, labor and annoyance. It's the fallen mindset of Adam that is intent on proving to all that he is adequate and complete apart from his Maker. It is the foundation of religion which is the idol man uses to rationalize and justify his behavior. It's man's effort to become what he already is by nature. Attempting to keep the rules of ethics and morality out of fear are the proof. Who we are isn't revealed by behavior, our behavior is revealed in who we truly are. Our flesh is the religious dimension of our lives that we believe ourselves to be. It is the separation in the Garden that is both transactional and nonrelational, therefore, there is no love. Sin is the embodiment of the lie. It is the distortion of who we are that results in the yearning for separation. This desire was the reason for Adam's disobedience and therefore his downfall.

The problem is that to not be in relationship is to no longer be seen as a "person". Those motivated by the flesh only pursue what benefits themselves. The fallen mindset of the flesh is separation and death but the Spirit, which literally means union, finds life and peace. This is an organic reality of participation in life. The false identity of the flesh cloaks itself in a death shroud of religion in order to justify an imitation of life. It doesn't simply distort our theology, it destroys the heart of who we are, that which can only exist in relationship. Just as in ancient Israel, the modern church has convinced itself that making an effort at keeping the rules is God's desire for man. It is a lie and an illusion. It is no substitute for the realization that God is Love and that He is our Father. It's the final verse in

Luke 15 concerning the prodigal son.

32 "We must celebrate and be glad for your brother was dead and is alive again and was lost and is now found."

What made the difference? He was found by and came to know his Father. When we know who our father is we will know who we are. That is why Jesus said I came from the Father to reveal Him. The flesh is religious and religion is both the spirit of antichrist and the false Messiah.

God is three persons in perfect relationship who are One and in whose image we are made. There is no escaping our design no matter what we think nor how hard we try to believe it. Our problem begins and ends with our perception of God and our innate need for Him. It is wrong thinking about who He is and thus who we are.

Let's go back to the Garden and attempt to unravel some of the misconceptions that have promoted this. Adam and Eve appear to have believed that God's denial of the fruit of the Tree of KGE was malicious in intent. They reasoned that it held the key to completing their image and likeness in God. The poignancy as well as the irony of the story was that they already were. Obviously, God didn't really want them to be like Him or He wouldn't withhold it. Thus, Adam harbored a desire to exalt himself over God. It's enticement as a tree to make one wise was the missing piece in their puzzled minds as to how to attain this. Something we often overlook about them was that they were still quite young and innocent in the grand scheme of their existence with little experiential frame of reference. It is the first reaction of a childish and immature mind to ask itself, what is wrong with me, when a question of character arises. In

spite of having revealed His kindness to them, for it is His kindness that leads to repentance (metanoia), they simply couldn't understand. Otherwise, they might not have done what they did for they had a choice. Exodus 31:3 tells us that He filled man with wisdom, understanding and knowledge, nevertheless, rather than believing God, they sought it from the Tree of the KGE, making it the original idol. Unlike many of our brethren who believe in the absolute sovereignty of God and that nothing happens unless ordained by Him, we know that they were allowed to do this in their own freedom. God has created all things in love for without freedom there can be no love, only bondage. We therefore live just as them, in a contingent world whereby God does not cause all things but causes all things to work to the good for He knows each of us face to face.

Gen 3:

13 "Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate."

The word God used in asking Eve her version of events for "done" is *asah* (aw saw') meaning to do or make. It doesn't mean to create from nothing, as only God can do, but to reform or fabricate something that already exists. In other words, "what is this you have recreated in your forbidden desire?" The Young's Literal Bible translates the word beguiled to mean to cause to forget. Therefore, their lust was powerful enough to draw them down an illusory path that led them to break relationship with God.

Gen 3:

15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

But God, who is rich in mercy, and because of His great love toward us, makes provision for His beloved children with the promise of the Seed. He explains the condition in which they now find themselves as the result of separation by way of their disobedience.

19 "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to (from) dust you shall return."

They have already begun the process of dying. Physically their bodies formed from the ground would decay unto death but there is a subtle promise hidden in this verse. Rather than "to" dust you shall return, some scholars believe it should read "from" dust" you shall return. Otherwise, the sentence wouldn't make sense. If they are already dust God wouldn't then announce that they would return to it, rather "from" it. This is His promise of resurrection and restoration of eternal life in The Seed.

22 "Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"--

The translation of this verse is very misleading and inaccurate. To read it literally means that they were not like God before the fall but now are. And the reason they are is because like God, they now know good and evil. Does know evil? You might attempt some kind of case in terms of His omniscience but that's not what is said. The word used for know is *yada*, meaning to know experientially and intimately. It's the word used for Adam knew his wife and she conceived. There is no justification for assigning this kind of characterization to God. According to Francois du Toit it should read, "Behold the man who was created like one of us, has also partaken of the knowledge (to know experientially) of evil." That is disfunction and destruction. (emphasis mine) It results in the religious system that attempts to manage

the dysfunctional fruit from the tree of I am not good enough, there's something innately or at least inherently wrong with me, commonly known as sin nature.

Now lest he puts forth his hand and eats of the tree of life and remain in this "lost identity" forever we must administer tender mercy. In Hebrew the word is racham. It is generally defined as compassion in both old and new testaments, however, it actually goes deeper as it is connected to a mother's womb. The envisioned metaphor is one of protection, security and motherly love along with childlike dependency within the womb.

23 "therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

To send forth can be translated more than one way. It can mean the way it appears, send away or send out; however, it can also mean allow to depart or let loose.

The meaning of ground, adamah, is the soil from which his physical body had been drawn and is a play on words in Hebrew. The ground that is cursed is the fallen mindset of the Adam. To till means to serve or even to be enslaved. Adam would now be the slave of the physical substance from which he was drawn.

In verse 24 we're told He drove out the man. To say man was driven out has some validity but it isn't the full picture. The word is garash and is used in

Exodus 10:

11 "No! Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."

This is the scene when Pharaoh relents and the children of Israel were driven from his presence. This term for drive has two sides to its meaning that should be considered. It means to walk out of a relationship, as in a divorce when the one leaving has determined that the one being left is a consuming devourer of their life. Therefore, it may appear to be the command to leave, however, it is actually the desire of the one leaving. Just as the Israelites had nothing but fear, hatred and resentment for Pharaoh, so did Adam and Eve toward God. In neither case did the parties want to stay. Adam and Eve needed no encouragement to leave as their fallen view of God was nothing short of fear and terror. By the same token God knew that they must leave or else expose them to eating of the other tree with permanent catastrophic results. It was with a heavy heart that He, who is love, must allow them to depart.

But not before He placed a flaming sword at the entrance, not to prevent them from re-entering for there was no danger of that.

Romans 3:

11 no one understands, no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside...

The purpose was to keep the way to the Tree of Life open from without. The word keep means to guard or protect. The flaming sword represented the presence of God just as in the Burning Bush that communicated with Moses. It was a picture of the Pre-incarnate Christ continuously calling man back to

that kiss of flame that refines him in perfect righteousness. The turning of the sword is actually the word for return or turn back. It is the idea Jesus was describing to Nicodemus in the term anothēn, to be born again or re-born from above. It is described in

Hebrews 4:12 in the Mirror as ‘the sword that is the Living Word that penetrates soul and spirit and joints and marrow. It ends the dominance of the realm of the five senses and its neutralizing effect upon man’s heart. It frees the spirit to once again be the ruling influence of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.’

He placed cherubim at the east of the garden alongside the flaming sword. The cherubim are most often interpreted as angels of high rank but I’m not convinced. The meaning is a creature of the imagination. They were embroidered on the great veil in the Temple which surrounded the Holy of Holies. The same veil that was torn in two at the crucifixion just as Jesus’ side was opened by the spear. As mentioned at the beginning God is our imagination. Could the two cherubim in fact be just that, the remaining members of the Trinity, a reference to the Father and The Spirit. After all, if Jesus is the sword we know that where one is so are the rest of the Godhead, for they are inseparable. Consider as I stated earlier that Adam was implanted in the garden and the garden implanted in Adam. What then is the garden alluding to? It is the heart and mind of the man. The words ground, soil, land, earth, etc. are used metaphorically throughout scripture to describe this very thing. Before the fall it was fertile ground for the spirit life both internally and externally. It meant paradise, which in Greek means “with sight. Afterwards it became the darkened chamber within, or hades, meaning without sight. No longer able to perceive the beauty surrounding him became of the blindness of his heart. Yet even then the light had not completely gone out.

Isa 42:

3 “A bent reed He will not break off, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.”

So let’s look at the verses in a different light.

19 ...you have returned to the ground in mortality for you were fashioned from it, for in dust you now find yourself in separation from My Spirit of life but “from” dust you will return (the Promise)

22 Then the Lord God said Behold, the man who was created like one of Us has partaken of the knowledge of evil. Now lest he puts forth his hand and eats of the Tree of Life and remains in this lost identity forever, we must administer tender mercy, expressed in womb love.

23 Therefore with a heart of sadness, knowing it to be best, He allowed them their desire to leave. They would no longer be immortal, not knowing death, but mortal and a servant to their distorted condition.

24 So, knowing their fear and animus toward Him, Jesus, the Creator, allowed them to depart, but not before placing Himself as the Flaming Sword of hope pointing the way back to the Garden. It was a promise protected by the fulness of the Godhead itself.

Mankind was suspended between life and death yet we get no indication from God of anger, displeasure or frustration with the young couple. He describes their consequences but his wrath was kindled not against them but the sin that now infected their minds. For God still resides eastward in the Garden as the beginning and the source. His fervent desire for oneness with man was not to be denied Him. The God with whom all things are possible had no intention of accepting this situation. He does not and never will

do abandonment. He never separated Himself from us, we separated from Him. Surely His goodness and mercy pursues us with inconceivable passion all the days of our lives. Nothing ever has nor ever will separate us from His love.

Amen