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Genesis

The Heart of Paradise

Chapter 2 (vs.9-10)

We've been looking at the book of beginnings and specifically, what we have is a book of the beginning of God's grace; as it is the beginning of the reconciliation of man. The Bible is a book about God. It's a theological book. It's telling us about God, what He is like, who He is, but it's also telling us how man responds or how he reacts as God begins to reveal Himself to him. So, it's just as telling about man as it is about God. We begin to see the nature of man, and what he's drawn to; yet the love of God that seems never to grow cold. He never seems to give up. So thus, the book goes through and begins to show us God reconciling man back to Himself. In spite of all of God's blessings, in spite of all of His goodness, man continues to reject. God continues to redeem. So, what a wonderful book of redemption and reconciliation, as we begin with all of the grace of God that just literally being poured out upon man, and we will ultimately see how man responds to that.

The very beginning of the Book of Genesis demonstrates to us the intricate involvement of God in His desire to have a relationship with man. The things that He makes for man, the creation and the forming of man, shows us, as the psalmist says, that He is intimately acquainted with all of our ways; that He is involved in our lives and loves us. It's all good, and that's what He states at the end of Genesis 1. Everything that He made was good. No, it was very good.

(James 1:17) "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

God is good.

Nevertheless, as we continue to go, we begin to see not only is He good, but He wants this relationship with us, and we see God preparing the ground for that relationship. As we looked at the seven days, I just want to reiterate the fact that the first day is demonstrating to us that only God can really bring light out of darkness, and only God can bring fulfillment, and only God can bring purpose out of emptiness and shallowness. Only God can do that. Only God can demonstrate distinction and distinguish, and we see His hand in ultimately showing us how special we are. He's going to do that, but He demonstrates that in creation. He demonstrates in the creation His desire to raise up hope; He demonstrates in creation His desire to appoint, to

assign, to enlighten. All these things are shown in the different days that He gives us. Ultimately in day 5, you see that He is a God who longs to give more. There is this sense of abundantly supplying. God is able to give beyond what we could ask or think. The grace of God is abundant. God gives more grace, Scripture tells us, and that's the heart of God. The fact that He would do all these things for man and that He would declare a willingness to sacrifice Himself for this relationship in day 7 is an amazing declaration. It's one of the reasons why that day 7 is such a special day. So, we see the heart of God in the days of creation.

In Chapter 2, we began to see God and His preparation for the intricate involvement in the relationship with man. He prepares the ground. He not only prepares the ground, but you begin to see literally the breath of God go into man. The breath of God, you can't get any more intimate than that. So, you can see the same parallel in the Gospels.

If you look with me in John 20 in particular, you'll see this desire of God to give us of His Spirit. In John 20, Jesus comes to the disciples and in verse 19, we have "the first day of the week," which is a great picture of a new creation. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." So, it starts off this way,

(John 20:19) "So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

(John 20:20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

(John 20:21) So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

(John 20:22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The breath of life. God's endowing them with the Spirit of His word, life from God.

(John 1:4) "In Him was life..."

That's the way the Gospel of John starts off, isn't it?

"And the life was the Light of men.

(John 1:5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

(John 1:12) "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..."

God desires to give us life. What does that look like? Well, in John 20, we see that it's the Holy Spirit coming upon us. As you read in John 14 and John 15, He is the Spirit of Truth. Truth, genuineness, sincerity; truth comes within us. That's like a breath of fresh air, isn't it? As well as you understand that He is the Spirit of the word of God. Thus, the word of God by itself is inspiring. All Scripture is "*theopneustos*," God breathed, and the word of God endows us with His word. Jesus will say, "The Spirit will remind you of all the things that I've said." I mean, you can walk away from hearing the words of God alive again. It takes you out of that death. So, Scripture is revealing to us this wonderful picture of life coming from God, and God's intent is to give us the breath of life through His wonderful Spirit.

You see it in Acts 2, as He does it at the church, and what is the sound that they hear? As of a mighty rushing wind? It says they were all filled with the Spirit of God. The breathing of God and the life of the church, and it becomes alive. Up to that point, the disciples were dead. Though they had the truth and walked with the truth, it was not within them, but the church was made alive, and what a wonderful picture that is.

We come to Genesis 2:8-9, and we come into the Garden of Eden that we oftentimes make reference to. I believe it's referred to as "paradise," really. Paul is going to make mention of the fact that there is a paradise in the third heaven; in which he was able to go up into. Jesus will tell the man by the cross next to Him, "This day you'll be with Me in paradise."

The interesting picture in Revelation 2 is that there is the tree of life in paradise. So, we have this interesting picture. "Paradise" in the New Testament specifically, is actually extrapolated from an oriental term, and just to let you know, Hebrew is actually an oriental language. So, the Hebrew or the Jewish way of thinking is oriental, but even when you read, it reads the way that oriental reading does. So, the point is that in the explanation of paradise, and the word, which is drawn out of this, fundamentally means a manicured forest. It is a picture of a garden that has been manicured so as to look beautiful. There's a special place Scripture is going to call it within the text here, the Garden of Eden, and we'll pick up in this.

I have actually given a title to this particular section, just these two verses we're going to be looking at, and that is "The Heart of Paradise." In the heart of paradise, more specifically, in the heart of the Garden of Eden, or another way of putting it would be, in the midst of the Garden of Eden, we're going to see two trees that are emphasized in the midst, or literally in the center, or I would say, in the heart of the Garden of Eden. Scripture is telling us something about God once again, and about His relationship to man. All of this is that which is pointing to that.

So, if you pick up with me in Genesis 2:8, it will begin by not an unusual thing, as He begins all the way through. As He starts a new topic, He'll always start with the general and goes to the specific; always from the broad to the narrow; always panoramic to the focused, and we're

going to start off with Him planting a garden, but then it will get focused on the center of that garden.

(Genesis 2:8) “The LORD God planted a garden...”

Now, if you back up into verse 7, that verse will start off very similar, “Then the LORD God...”

If you'll back up even further, in verse 4,

“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God...”

And the emphasis of course, is the personal name of God begins the title within this phrase, as well as the strong or the powerful God that's behind that. So, it starts off personal, “LORD.” The personal God that wants to have a relationship with you is in the forefront. Then His great power, “*Elohim*,” “the strong One,” is conveyed. Those two names are telling us that God is intimately involved in this happening and has been in the process of then bringing man into this relationship. It's all been about this relationship.

So, verse 8 reads this way,

“The LORD God planted a garden...”

Now it's not just somebody farming, this is God once again giving His deep involvement in this.

There's an interesting parallel in Isaiah 5, if you look there with me. I could give you a number of passages that make reference to this, but I've oftentimes thought of Genesis when I've read this particular text in Isaiah 5.

(Isaiah 5:1) “Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

(Isaiah 5:2) He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.”

It then goes on and it says,

(Isaiah 5:4) “What more was there to do for My vineyard? ...”

The point within the text is God was working to give the best for His people. The thought is that in the process of giving best, wouldn't you just naturally think that there would be a response back with that? Not only a sense of gratitude, but a sense of love for somebody that's gone to all that work? So, the fact that God had planted and established a garden, it's wanting us to know once again, the Lord God did this. He's all in this and it's a very important event. We can go back to many of the other things that He created and once again, not nearly the detail that we're going to see in this little garden. I mean, we literally have not only the whole universe that has been shrunk down to this little garden, but now the focus is going to be only in the center of the garden. It's pretty interesting. So, if you look at the phrase, it says,

“The LORD God planted a garden...”

“*Gan*” is the word that is used, and once again, the best way to describe that is a manicured forest. It would probably be the same word for “paradise” in the New Testament.

“The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden...”

Now, He specifically wants to get in the word “east” here. It's a very significant word to God. When you begin to follow this word through, it is interesting that it's oftentimes translated as something very different. Let me show you an example.

If you look with me in Micah 5. Just to show you a couple of examples of this particular word “east,” which is going to be an introduction. Micah 5 is the great passage of declaration of the Messiah, when He was going to be born. If you remember in the Book of Matthew, when Herod is trying to find out where the Christ child is, and they go, basically Micah 5:2, “It's going to be in Bethlehem.”

(Micah 5:2) “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”

Do you see “east” in there? Scripture is telling us is that this word, “east,” makes reference to going back to the beginning. More specifically, going back to eternity past. An interesting picture that you'll see.

You'll see it mentioned in Proverbs 8:22-23 and Habakkuk 1.

Since we're in the minor prophets here, if you look with me in Habakkuk 1:12,

“Are You not from everlasting...”

It is the word "east." We would probably put in there, "Are you not from the east?" But once again, the word actually means "from everlasting." So, it's a picture of, I would say, where God abides.

In Zechariah 14, if you look there with me, it's a picture of the Messiah coming, "And the day is coming when..." Of course, you remember the whole event when Jesus is talking to His disciples, and He goes on the Mount of Olives, and they go, "What are the signs that You're coming? Because once you're standing on the Mount of Olives, this is like You're coming, right? It's like You're taking over." They get that from Zechariah 14, that's why they asked that in Matthew. But if you look with me in Zachariah Chapter 14, the time will come when the world comes against little Jerusalem and surround little Jerusalem, that's verses 1 through 3. Then the day comes when Christ comes and intercedes for Jerusalem (verse 4), and in that day, His feet will stand, where? On the Mount of Olives which is in the front of Jerusalem on the east. The east side of the wall of Jerusalem will face the Mount of Olives. It actually faces the Mount of Olives. The Jews believe that when the Messiah comes, He will come through the east gate. Right now, the east gate is sealed shut. If you were to look at the wall, you would just see huge arches where the gate was, but it's sealed. The way the Jews see it, it's not to be opened until the time that the Messiah comes. Let me show you a couple of passages where they get that from.

If you look with me, Ezekiel 43:1 reads this way,

"Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east;

(Ezekiel 43:2) and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east..."

You could actually put in there, "from the east," or "from the way of eternity."

"... And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory."

If you look in Ezekiel 44, it'll follow this point.

(Ezekiel 44:1) "Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut."

(Ezekiel 44:2) The LORD said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.""

Now they actually believe this eastern gate, they actually call it the "gate of mercy," was the gate that Jesus walked through when He was here, but it has been now sealed shut since I think about the 1500s. Some of the Jews, depending on where their faith is, actually believe that the day will come when the Messiah comes through that gate. Why do I bring all these up? Well, the reason I bring that up is that right at the very beginning, God is wanting us facing the east,

where He's coming from. So, that the picture of the garden is it's going to be a place where man meets Him. That's one of the reasons why He's developing this garden. It's something that He's making for man, but He wants them to know, "It's a place to meet Me." And we will read that in the cool of the day, Adam will do that.

We all plan certain things when we build things. I would think you'd have to have some sort of plan. "What's the purpose of this? What's the purpose of that?" And you can't help but walk away from this particular passage going, "The purpose of this garden was to have a place of meeting." And it should not surprise you, that the very place in which God would choose to meet with His disciples before He goes to the cross is the garden of Gethsemane; which is there and facing the east of the gate. So, the point is that you have this garden, and why even call it the garden of Gethsemane? Well, it was actually Gethsemane, because of the fact that it was a name that referred to "wine press" or "oil press." And we literally see at that moment, as Christ was getting ready to go to the cross, the pressing of Christ in this time and the fact that He's going to be spilled out for our sakes. But it's an interesting picture of His anointing for that work; that God is being anointed for the work of saving us. It is through that suffering that He will bring many sons to glory, or more specifically, that He had fellowship with us. It is one of the themes of the Book of Hebrews, that through the suffering will come that. It's important that you remember that point, because we're going to go into this garden and we're going to see the heart of the garden and what God is actually doing as He's making the things that He's making.

So, if you go back to Genesis 2,

(Genesis 2:8) "The LORD God planted a garden toward the east..."

He describes this particular area in Eden. The best way to describe Eden is, it just simply means a pleasurable place. In His presence is fullness of joy; in His right hand there are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11) So, this is a place of pleasure; it is a place of delight. Is it not true that God wants good things for us? Is there anything that He would withhold? So, what we're seeing is His involvement in this, His desire to meet man and His desire to give him a place of great delight and great enjoyment. Paul writes in Timothy, and I think that oftentimes the fact is people go in extremities, "You shouldn't have anything." So, you go into these monasteries, and you don't have anything. You deprive yourself of everything, and that's a "saint," which isn't true. Then the other extreme is, "God wants you to have all the riches, and you never want to be poor or suffer any loss." And that's not true. The point is that He's not going to withhold any good thing, and He desires to give us good things. As Paul will write, in particular in Timothy, he says, "Look, that you have food and clothing, you ought to rejoice in that, and godliness actually is a means of great contentment; a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment." His point in that is contentment doesn't come from having stuff. He goes on, and says, "But tell

the rich not to be conceited, or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things; that they might enjoy them.” Scripture is very clear that God wants us to enjoy life. Now, does it mean that we will never have any problems? No, but having the problems are going to be necessary for you to enjoy your life, and we're going to see that come into play. God wants to give us good things, and it's not a horrible thing to have good things; more specifically, to have enjoyment. Not a bad thing, and sometimes it's the things that kind of make things more enjoyable, but on the whole it's the relationships and you see that specifically in the Book of Proverbs. If you look here, you just see the heart of God and desire, and it's no different than really any father. I mean, dads want to give their kids stuff. They just want to give their kids love. They want to give their kids time. They want to give all the things that are valuable and precious to them, and they don't want to hold back anything, but sometimes you realize that by just showering all these things, it doesn't really help. You watched the progression of God with Israel, and throughout, you know, He's given this blessing. Of course, He gives them into the promised land, and what happens when they have all the promised land? When you go to the next thing out of the Book of Joshua, you're in the Book of Judges, and you realize that man is just rejecting God. It's fundamentally what Moses said, “You're going to go into the promised land, but you're not going to be able to handle it. You're going to rebel.” One of the things that we just can't seem to handle is having stuff. So, the garden starts off with God's great generosity and His grace and His desire to give. It's His nature to do that.

Then it says in the passage,

“... and there He placed the man whom He had formed.”

I mean, you could just sense that it was the best of the best that God had in store for man.

Verse 9 then begins to focus even more, and it gets us and takes us right into the heart or the center of the garden. It reads this way,

(Genesis 2:9) “Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing...”

Probably where we get the idea of the word “Eden” within the text.

“...to the sight and good for food...”

Here again, good to the senses; good for appearance. It was a beautiful place, and how wonderful that is.

“...the tree of life...”

Now, we're going to get specific.

“... also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Where? In the midst of the garden. This is really where the text is bringing us. It's taking us to the heart of paradise. So, the question is, what is at the heart of paradise? What is this paradise thing all about? And these two trees that are mentioned are going to literally take us to where God desires us to be. Remember that this garden is situated in such a way that is pointing to the eternal One, and that relationship with the eternal One. So, what is at the heart of this? Well, it starts off with the tree of life, and there's quite a bit of Scripture that deals with the tree of life. Proverbs will mention the tree of life quite a few times, but the connection that you see with the tree of life is always a connection with righteousness. It's very interesting.

Let me give you one of the verses and we won't go through all of them, but in Proverbs 11:30, it reads this way,

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life..."

Now, you heard the word "righteous" in there, right? The fact that it literally describes it as a "tree of life." Now, "tree," we already talked about this, but it gives that wonderful picture of something firmly planted. You go back to Psalm 1, and it's very clear that if in fact you'll meditate on the word of God day and night, you'll be like a tree firmly planted by the water. So, you have this sense of something that's not easily blown away.

(Psalm 1:4) "The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away."

So, you have the one firmly planted, and you have the other that is easily moved. Throughout history, you see God meeting man at the tree. The oaks of Mamre with Abraham. Where does He meet him? At the tree. Right. Even when you see one of the disciples that were called, Bartholomew, where is he sitting when God calls him? Under the tree. And it was a place where Jews would oftentimes study, because they saw the connection of God meeting man at the tree, and they saw the connection of God meeting Abraham by the tree. So, their perception is, "We're going to meet God by the tree." So, there is that wonderful picture. Of course, Christ will take them up in the garden, which will be full of trees, and where they're pressing the oil for the olive trees. In that particular context, once again, it's very clear that God is wanting a relationship and He gives a symbolism of the tree, and He desires us to not only be firmly planted, but to bear fruit. The tree is clearly that sign of bearing fruit. So, the connection is always with righteousness.

There's another passage in Revelation 22:14. So, we've gone from Genesis, now all the way to Revelation. In Revelation 22:14, it reads that those who keep God's commandments will have the right to the tree of life. Those who, what? Keep the commandments. So, you have righteousness, and those who keep the commandments. Well, it's the same thing basically, tied once again to, what? The tree of life. Where does life come from?

Do you remember the guy that comes up to Jesus in Matthew? If you look with me in Matthew 19, it's a great picture within this passage. He comes up to Christ and wants to know how you can get eternal life.

(Matthew 19:16) “And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?””

He has this connection with life comes from doing the right thing, doing good, works of righteousness.

(Matthew 19:17) “And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.””

What's the answer that Jesus gives? Do the right thing. The tree of life.

(Matthew 19:18) “Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” ...”

But as you look at this particular passage, you realize that it's not just a righteousness that is superficial, but it's a righteousness of the heart that God is looking for.

What is the tree of life making reference to? Well, when you read about it in Revelation 2:7, and you might turn there, the tree of life is going to be available to, let's see how does it put it in Revelation 2:7? I think it uses the word “overcome.”

(Revelation 2:7) “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”

It's an interesting picture, isn't it? So, connection, tree of life, what brings life? What is it that brings life to anyone? Well, do the right thing. I think one of the things that we battle with is we believe the lie of Satan, that if you do the right thing, you're going to have sorrow; you're missing out on all the wonderful things that life could give you. But God says, “No, doing the right thing is what gives you life.” So, it's that interesting picture that is here.

The wonderful thing about the garden and what we're going to see as well as in heaven, is that spiritual things, things that enlighten us, things that give us literally a breath of fresh air; that we would perceive in the physical realm, here on Earth. For instance, you could have a good day, and you go, “Man, I just can't think of a better day than this particular day.” And it's just the greatest day ever, right? What was it that brought you the great day? Well, everything went your way, and everybody was happy, and “I got to do the things that I wanted to do.” I mean, you just go through, and “I can't think of a better day.” It was all those things. If you could take that and you could bottle it and you could put it in a fruit, and then you take a bite of that fruit, and you'd instantly have that. How God literally takes those wonderful, marvelous things, and He places them in heaven, and He goes, “And you can have more.” And if you can imagine

having more, being at the tree of life; so, the wonderful benefits that God has in store for us, that God wants us to have all these wonderful things. How they come about is just as interesting, because once again, our perception is that it's something more to acquire and sometimes even to fight over, but God says, "Let Me show you the way to it." So, He takes us, He brings us into the garden, and He tells us about this tree of life that He's going to give us and, in some way, Adam and Eve have no idea what this tree of life is about. They're newbies, so they have no idea what this tree of life is, and there they are in this garden, and God goes, "Now, you can have abundant life. It's for you."

Now, we know at the end result that they're not going to choose that tree first, they're going to choose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that God will separate them from the tree of life; which in some ways is not only their protection, but is keeping them from judgment, because remember that tree is directly connected with the right thing, righteousness. So, God is keeping them from that because we know that there would be literally an eternal judgment in this particular realm. So, you have that tree and now you have the other tree in there, and the other tree that's in the garden is not the tree of good and evil, but the tree of, what? The knowledge of good and evil. So, that's a distinction that you don't want to mess up on. The "knowledge" is making reference to the discernment of good and evil; the realizing that there's a distinction between the two. God is giving this tree, and He goes, "You could have the distinction between good and evil." Now, with saying that it is important as well to understand that God created this tree, and if God created this tree, then evil can't be bad, because does He create anything bad?

So, if you look with me in Isaiah, and you're probably familiar with these particular passages, but I just want to solidify. It says in Isaiah 45, that clearly, there's no one like God, and that God is the creator of all things. No doubt about that.

(Isaiah 45:6) "That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun
That there is no one besides Me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other,

(Isaiah 45:7) The One forming light and creating darkness..."

Now, let me say this, it is interesting to note that we know that light is eternal; God is light. So, it doesn't say He created light, it said He formed light, but He created darkness. Maybe our perspective was, "Maybe darkness has always been." No, darkness had to be created, because God is light.

"... Causing well-being and creating calamity;" or literally translated, "evil."

God created evil. "Calamity" is translated within the passage because calamity has a connotation of things like pain, sorrow, misery, difficulty, and hardship; all the things that come that are things that we try to avoid. The word that is used within the text, "רָעָה," can be used in a very negative way in the sense that it gives the inflection of something bad, because obviously, who wants pain, misery, hardship and difficulty? Who wants all of that? Who wants calamity, right? Nobody wants calamity, but the passage is telling us in Genesis that God had created calamity in this tree. Now, not just calamity, but the knowledge or the distinction of calamity and good. Now good, has a sense of things that are pleasurable. It's a very broad term; that which is inerrantly good in the sense of virtuous. It makes reference to things that are successful. It's all the things that you want. When we talk about good, you go, "That's what I want, the good." And God says, "Well, you know, there's a bad too." And if we were Adam and Eve, we'd go, "No, we haven't experienced that." He goes, "Well, don't." Now, the question you have to pose in your mind is, why in the world would God stick this in the middle of the garden? Because we know that it actually becomes that temptation.

In fact, if you look in Genesis 3, and we'll jump ahead; it's like cheating, isn't it? The serpent is taking advantage of the fact that we're in the center of the garden and these trees are right there and they're just like, wow, I mean, they're really good-looking trees. The fruit is really good looking. Scripture tells us that it's very pleasurable to look at, as well as it's really good food. Of course, the serpent is going to piggyback on that. If you look in the passage,

(Genesis 3:3) "but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"

(Genesis 3:4) The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!"

(Genesis 3:5) "For God knows..."

See the word "knows" there? This is a very interesting point that he's making, because the point that he's making is, "God's holding back knowledge from you." I think I was reading some comedian made it famous, but "Yadda yadda yadda yadda yadda." That's actually a Hebrew word, which means "to know." So actually, it's this word that "yāda" is used. So, the way that it's used, and when people say, "Yada yada yada," it's basically, "That's insignificant knowledge that you're throwing at me." But what we're talking about is, that the serpent's basically saying, "God's withholding information from you. God's withholding something very deep and meaningful, and knowledge from you, because God knows that you'll be like Him knowing it."

If you look at the end of verse 5, "knowing," there's that word "yāda" again.

"... knowing good and evil."

“He's holding back.” Now, we know that God made the tree, and we know that the tree was good; had its purpose. The question still beckons, why would He do this? Why would He wave a proverbial carrot in front of our nose and try to tempt us? The point is not about temptation at all. It's about God's focus and where He's going to take us. Let's see, which way are we facing? We're facing to have a relationship with Him. So, these trees are all about the day in which we'll have a relationship with Him. It was the promise, “You're going to have a relationship with Me.” Now, I know that we all know that God knows everything is going to happen before it happens. So, you can't sit back and go, “God knew what we were going to do. Therefore, He did that. So, it was all His plan.” Well, if He told you no, there was a good reason why He told you no. However, you'll see this throughout Genesis, and then you go into the rest of the books of the Bible; you see how God miraculously takes the bad that we do and turns it into good. It's amazing. I mean, He wouldn't be God if He could only cause good things to turn out for good, but God is able to take bad things and turn them into good. So, we have this interesting picture of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What actually is He doing? Well, He's encouraging and ultimately focusing on the relationship that we're going to have with Him through this event. What event? The event of having to discern good from evil.

When you go through Scripture, and we're going to jump way ahead because there's so many passages that make reference to this. But we're going to jump all the way to Ecclesiastes 7, and as you go to Ecclesiastes 7, and you can turn there or not, I'm just going to talk about it. It starts off by saying, fundamentally, good days and bad days are both days that God has orchestrated. So, we would say good and evil. Now, what he'll say at the end of his focus on the two, that is good and evil, is, “God has made them both.” The day that's good, and the day that's evil, God has made them both. We go, “So, why does He make evil?” And if you read Ecclesiastes 7, it's very clear by the time you come out of it, that evil has a work in the life of man that begins to cause him to think more deeply. What is clear in the garden, is that having only good never made man deep, and never made man virtuous. You see that in the sense that when the woman sins, then immediately the man throws the woman under the bus. You're going, “Well, if good always brings about good, then what is it that will bring about the greater good?” And it will be the discernment between good and evil. The bizarre thing is that Satan has always used this whole sense of God holding back knowledge from you as a way of tempting us and controlling us throughout history. By the time you come into the New Testament, the word is not “know” as much as it is Gnosticism. And so “gnostic” is “*ginōskō*” in the Greek, “to know.” Paul will write in 1 Corinthians 8: 1, “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.”

If you think about it, the sense of knowing something and having your eyes open, is not enough to actually bring about good. You could discern, you could say, “Well, that's bad and this is good. I'm going to stay away from bad and I'm going to do good.” But it's actually through the

suffering of bad that you're going to find out good. Now, you wouldn't naturally think about that. So, throughout the New Testament, there's this battle of people that are thinking that they have all this knowledge, and they're rejoicing over the fact of how smart they are. Through that, they began to separate themselves, and they go, "We have knowledge." And God goes, "Ok, but it's not helping." The perception is, that man thinks that it's all about the knowledge, and God goes, "No. It's about understanding the way the knowledge of good and evil works, discerning the two." So, how does it work? Well, Scripture tells us that greater love has no man than this, then one who lays down his life for a friend. (John 15) What is that telling us? Well, that's telling us that in order to demonstrate the greatest of love, you have to experience the greatest of evil. It would be impossible for you to convey the depth of love that is shown in that way without experiencing evil, without giving your life, without dying. So, the process of evil is that which actually creates that depth inside. God is demonstrating to us all the way back in the garden that these are necessary ingredients for you to have relationships. Does God want us to have a relationship with Him?

So, you're reading in James and he's saying that the hardships, the trials are what strengthens you to put greater trust in God. If it weren't for the trials of your life, you would not trust Him more. "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials because the testing of your faith produces a greater endurance." If you only trusted somebody because they did something good for you or you only trusted somebody when everything was going well, did you really trust them? If in fact things went bad and you turned to Him and you said, "I trust you." As Job would say, "Though You slay me, yet I will trust You." Now, where's the greater trust, "everything's going fine," or "though You slay me, yet I will trust You"? So, James will give us that interesting picture of how hardship and difficulty actually strengthens our relationship and trust with God.

1 Peter will give us that wonderful picture of that difficulty actually producing a kind of excellence in us. The more you suffer, the more the behavior can become excellent by your response. So, it produces, and as Peter describes us, like precious stones that are really made more valuable through the process of the heat being turned up; that it produces a greater excellence.

So, let me show you a couple of passages in particular in Hebrews that gives that picture as well.

(Hebrews 2:9) "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

(Hebrews 2:10) For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

That would be evil. He's actually perfecting the Son through sufferings of calamity. Suffering is a hardship. Suffering is painful; suffering is hurtful.

(Hebrews 2:11) “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father...”

In other words, God's saying, “How do you think you're purged? How do you think you're purified?”

If you go a little bit further in the Book of Hebrews,

(Hebrews 5:7) “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

(Hebrews 5:8) Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

(Hebrews 5:9) And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.”

What's happening? Through suffering He learns obedience and He reveals to us, well, once again, greater love has no man than this.

(Hebrews 5:13) “For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

(Hebrews 5:14) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

That's the same thing that's in Genesis, to have the knowledge or the discernment between good and evil. What is the discernment that he's talking about? Well, he's clearly talking about those things which make for the relationship. Look, it's no mistake that Jesus hung on a tree. When you look at that cross, what you're looking at is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because what you're seeing is the evil of man, and all the hurt and all the pain that he inflicted upon Christ. You're looking at Christ as He takes all of that evil and all of the good that comes out of it, and you're actually discerning not only the nature of man, but your discerning the love of God by virtue of good and evil on that cross. It's a necessary tree to partake of in order for us to have that relationship with Him. Because once again, without that, we can't have a sense of paradise, and that's why they're in the heart of paradise, because there are two

things that you need in order to be in paradise with God. The thought is, "Yeah, I need to be in paradise because it's a really cool place and there are a lot of wonderful things. It's a beautiful place with a lot of pleasurable things." It's going to be a wonderful place. Heaven is a wonderful place, right? Full of glory and grace, but what's going to make it paradise? Two things, righteousness and love. Righteousness is seen by the tree of life. If you could imagine, and Proverbs is full of proverbs that make reference to this, that wouldn't it be better to be in a corner of an attic, than where feasting is with great company of people? What is it talking about? Wouldn't it be better to be with righteous people; people doing the right thing, instead of people that are hurtful and hateful and destructive? I mean, how could it be heaven, how could it be paradise, if there is no righteousness? It would be impossible for you to have an enjoyable time. So, you have this wonderful picture of life, of doing the right thing.

Even today, you can see people trying to get together with family and they're trying to create a sense of a paradise in their own home by virtue of the fact that they're eating and they're feasting; maybe they have a wonderful spread and maybe it's a beautiful house and everything is laid out perfect, but it's such a miserable place to be. Why? Cause nobody's doing the right thing. You need that tree of right. You need to give life. I've been in places like that and I'm looking around at people, and everybody just looks dead, because nobody's doing the right thing; nobody really enjoys. So, you need that, but you also need the depth of love. It is an interesting thing that happens when you have men go off to war and they come back and the camaraderie that they have because they had suffered together. Isn't it amazing how suffering brings us together? As believers, if we're willing to suffer for doing what is right, that the difficulty of our life is actually what brings a greater camaraderie to one another. It is the place of fellowship. The place of the cross is the place of fellowship. It is what He has done for us. It is His love for us that has been displayed, and there's no mistake that good and evil is a necessary ingredient for that relationship. Did man do the right thing by partaking of the tree? Absolutely not, but once again, what God was proving by those trees in there, is these are necessary ingredients.

See, this is the key because what we're trying to do is figure out "what if," and you can't go there because it's not happening. You have to focus on why He did create those, and what He's saying is, in these two trees is the heart of paradise, and from these two trees, enjoyment and pleasure; the light comes from. If you don't have those two ingredients in your life, you're never going to have it. There has to be a depth of love in order for that to exist. So, interesting picture as you come into this, and we'll continue to go through and draw out. I do think it should be noted, and I know I've just kind of touched upon this, but it is bizarre to me how man will focus on the whole knowledge aspect rather than what God is actually doing with the trees. So, with man, it's just become an academic; it's all about knowledge. God says, No. It's about the

discernment of good and evil.” And that's what you want to focus on. But clearly, man has gone on the rabbit trail and that's what he focuses on.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your loving kindness to us, and for the display of Your work in our lives. Lord, we know that everything was created for a purpose, and You were drawing us to You. This is a thing of fellowship that You have created that we might come to You and realize that fellowship is far more than just having everything perfect around us. It is having a heart that is like You, a heart that is willing to die for those things that are precious. Lord, we just want to have that heart, because we know that there is no happiness without it. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.