

THE FULLY PREACHED GOSPEL “Tending Our Garden”

Gen 2:8-9

8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. NIV

The Lord God planted the garden and He it was that placed the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the center of it. Part of His purpose was to supply man (tree of life) and prove man (tree of knowledge of good and evil). This sharing has more to do with what these trees represent than what they actually were. The purpose of this message is that we may learn to avoid original sin.

Gen 2:15-17

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." NIV

This may come as a shock and a surprise, but the tree of knowledge of good and evil is still among us. In our midst, if you will. Thanks to Adam's sin, the fruit of this tree resides in every unregenerate heart and its flavor sits as a tantalizing memory in the souls of many of the saints. The fruit of this tree still appears to us to be desirable. And yet, it must be avoided at all costs because it always brings death when ingested.

Matt 13:3-9 NIV

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.

4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

9 He who has ears, let him hear."

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

- 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.
- 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but **the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.**
- 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Luke 8:4-8

- 4 While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:
- 5 "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.
- 6 Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.
- 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.
- 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
- 11 "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.
- 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.
- 13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.
- 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they **are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.**
- 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. NIV

Bear in mind that we are talking about gardening. How is your garden? The Lord teaches us that there are several types of ground: hard packed, rocky, thorny, and good. I want to concentrate on the thorny for a minute.

Jesus called worry, the deceit of riches, and pleasures thorns that choke out our fruitfulness. Unlike the seed that fell on the path or among the rocks, the seed in the thorny ground did grow up. Until fruit bearing time, those plants looked no different than the plants on the good ground. But once the plants in good ground bore fruit, it was apparent that the plants among the thorns were deficient.

How is your garden? Is it full of good looking plants with lots of structure and nice green leaves, but no fruit? If we find ourselves in this condition, how are we to cultivate the soil of our hearts so that we do not become or remain bad ground? To answer this question, it is necessary to go back to the original garden.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil imparted its knowledge of evil through participation with it. Once man became evil, he sorrowed for the good he had had. Gaining discernment by defilement always leads to cursed ground. Note what choked the fruit from the plant: worry, deceit, pleasures. It was knowledge of the world by participating in the world's ways that

choked the seed on the thorny ground. It was nothing less than eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But there was another tree in the center of the garden, the tree of life. What was the tree of life? I can't tell you literally, but the Bible does tell us symbolically.

The Tree of Life-

Prov 3:18

She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed. NIV

Where the forbidden tree gave experiential knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life is wisdom itself!

Prov 11:30 "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." NIV

How do we cultivate the fruit of righteousness in our lives?

Heb 12:11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. NIV

God cultivates it in us through discipline. His discipline drives us to holiness and that holiness produces a harvest of righteousness.

Prov 13:12 "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." NIV

When we lose sight of the hope, our hand is on the branch of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and to be sure if we do not shift our focus, we will eat its deadly fruit. Our longing, our hope will be fulfilled. Being sure of this is like abiding in the shadow of the boughs of the tree of life, of which we shall eat in New Jerusalem. (Note that wisdom is a tree of life and that those who win souls are wise!)

Prov 15:4 NIV

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

As the leaves of the tree of life are for healing, so are those who with their tongues utter healing words a tree of life.

The qualities wherein which the tree of life spring are the qualities we need to develop to have good soil that brings forth fruit.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil-

Rom 16:19

Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. NIV

God would have us to be innocent regarding evil. Innocent means unstained by it, blameless. When we learn about evil by participation, we are eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. True, we will know good because we will be aware of what we have lost as Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness. And we will know evil for we have participated in it. But when we learn in this manner from the forbidden tree, we are neither wise concerning good nor innocent regarding evil.

Matt 10:16

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. NIV

Much is said about spiritual warfare and the authority of the believer over the enemy. In what I say next, I am not negating those truths. But imagine for a minute the picture our Lord paints here. He tells us plainly that He has sent us sheep out to deal with wolves. Now, no sheep can hold its own against wolves. And yet, Jesus gives us the key to survive such a harsh environment. Without its protection, I dare say we all run the risk of becoming dog food in the spiritual battle. What is the key? Being wise and innocent, eating from the tree of life.

Phil 2:14-16

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,
15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe
16 as you hold out the word of life-in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. NIV

As a tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, so a complaining one is one that is spewing the nectar of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If we must do everything without complaining or arguing to become blameless and pure, then it must follow that when we do complain and argue we are not blameless. God has made us to shine. Winning is a glory stealing sin.

Eph 5:3-14

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.
4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.
5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-such a man is an idolater-has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.
7 Therefore do not be partners with them.
8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light
9(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)
10 and find out what pleases the Lord.
11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.
12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.
13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible,

14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." NIV

Walking in darkness is fruitless. Our job is not to involve ourselves in the darkness. Our job is to shine the light of truth to expose the darkness. We do not need to know evil, we only need to discern it. Discerning evil is being shrewd as a serpent, for then we know the danger without feeling the trap. It is also being innocent as a dove, for having discerned we need not be deceived and be stained by participation in it.

Heb 5:14

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. NIV

We need to train ourselves to distinguish good from evil. How do we do this? We learn what is good and knowing what is good will cause the evil to stand out in sharp relief.

Fruitfulness-

Avoiding the original sin of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil is a matter of fruitfulness. When we eat of the tree of life, we will be fruitful. And fruitfulness is what we were made for.

John 15:1-8, 16

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and **appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last.** Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. NIV

How do we tend our gardens?

1. If the ground is hard, allow the plow of chastisement (Prov. 11:30; Heb. 12:11).

2. Once the ground is plowed, receive the wisdom of the washing water of the Word (Prov 3:18; Eph 5:26).

3. When the weeds of life encroach upon your crop, pull them up with perseverance to see the harvest (Prov 13:12).

4. Produce the fruit to your bearing capacity, being a healing tongue that is a tree of life (Prov 15:4).