

Life: God completes the story

August 9, 2013

- *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Aug. 25 focuses on John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:1-4; 22:1-5, 12-14.*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He placed two trees in the garden: The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. God told Adam and Eve to stay away from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but they were free to eat from the Tree of Life and every other tree. Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden. They had communion with him, and all was well.

But then they decided to disobey God. The decision to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil led to utter separation and brokenness. Fellowship with God was severed, and humanity was exiled from the garden. Scripture says God sent them out of the garden so they would not eat from the Tree of Life and live forever. Sin brought waves of consequences, including disease, fractured relationships, emptiness and ultimately death.

Death was a gift

If Adam and Eve reached the Tree of Life and ate from its branches, humanity would live forever in absolute brokenness. God showed incredible love and grace by ushering us out of the garden, so hope would remain. Death was a gift.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, we see God paving the way for a relationship with humankind again. He made a covenant with Abraham, Moses and David. He gave us the law so we would have a picture of how life ought to be lived. He guided the building of the temple so his Spirit could dwell here on Earth. He set up the sacrificial system so sins could be

forgiven and fellowship could be restored.

Ultimately, he sent his son, Jesus. God in the flesh stepped down from heaven to walk with us. He lived a perfect life, took on the sins of the world and made the final payment for our disobedience. Jesus was beaten for our rebellion and crucified for our crimes. He was raised from the dead on the third day and went to prepare a place for us to spend eternity. This eternal home will be beautiful, filled with the presence of God, and there will be no more tears or brokenness (Revelation 21:1-4).

The Genesis signpost

N.T. Wright put it this way: "The glorious world of Genesis 1 was the beginning of something rather than an end in itself. It was itself a great signpost, pointing to the world that God always intended to make out of it."

When all things are made new and everything broken is put back together, we once again will dwell with God and the Tree of Life. Garden life will be ours once again. Revelation 22:2 says the tree will heal the nations with its leaves. God will make all things new and will live with us in the way he always intended.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil already has been devoured. We have chosen sin and have tasted the fruit of bitterness, pain and disease for many days. But the Tree of Life is before us. When Jesus returns, he will make all things new, and we will live forever with him (Revelation 1:5).

Today, we must live life between the two trees. We must navigate our struggles with the end in mind. We must face sin with the promise of forgiveness. We must endure pain, knowing healing is in our future. We must pray his will be done on this earth, just as it is in heaven. This is not the end of the story.

Scaffolding designed to come down

N.T. Wright used this example: "Earlier today, I came upon some workmen who were putting scaffolding up around an old stone building. Scaffolding is normally extremely functional: It's made to do a job, not to look pretty. But supposing a builder decided to construct a beautiful shell of scaffolding? Supposing he made it so stunning that people came to admire the scaffolding itself, without even realizing that there was something far, far more impressive being built inside it? When the building was finished, some might be sad at the thought that this wonderful sight was to be taken away. But the builder would, of course, insist on removing the scaffolding, however splendid it was. That was the point of it in the first place, to do its job and then be dismantled for the ultimate reality, the real new building, could be seen in all its glory."

The scaffolding will come down, and God's eternal home will be filled with people of all colors, races, backgrounds and economic groups. We will be reunited with our God fully. And he will complete the story he started so long ago.