

The Tree in the Middle of the Garden

Revelation 21:22–22:14

#43 in our series “The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation”

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This document was prepared by Michael Hanna using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon (available [on our website](#)). Please let Michael know if you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document: themichaelhanna@thesanctuarydowntown.org. Thank you!

Prayer

Lord God I thank you that you have literally done everything. An entire creation in order to make us feel your love. And Lord God I pray that this morning you would cause us to preach. I'm praying for us, that we would love you with all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our soul, and all of our strength. And Father I pray especially for those who may be hearing this for the first time, as we've been preaching through the Revelation for a year and a half. God, I thank you that your Word is really one, and all of the pieces seem to be coming together now. But Lord I pray that you would help people, help us connect the dots in our minds, our hearts, our spirits, our souls, that you would be glorified in us Lord God. In Jesus' name, as we preach, amen.

Message

For the last three messages from the Revelation we've been looking at the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. Last week we looked at this shocking picture at the end of Scripture.

The Gates of Heaven are always open...and there are people outside that don't go in.

We conjectured that the doors are always open, and they don't go in because:

1. The doors are always open.
2. You cannot pay.
3. You cannot labor; you must rest.
4. You can no longer be a “winner.”
5. You can no longer be a “loser.”
6. You can no longer justify yourself.
7. You can no longer hide.
8. You can no longer be alone.
9. You will die; you will lose your life and find it.
10. You must surrender to Love.

It appears that you can't go to heaven unless you want to go to heaven. So the question is not: “who wants to go to heaven?” but “How do you want to go to heaven, when you don't want to go to heaven?”

“How do you want what you don't want?”

I alluded to the answer last week. It has to do with a tree, and how we understand the Bible, and the nature of all things.

For the last several hundred years modern people in Western Civilization have tended to believe that the cosmos is all that is, was, and ever will be. And so, the cosmos has no beginning, no end, and no plot. And so, if there is a story, it's only the one that we're writing.

Ironically, physicists no longer think that way. However, most Christians still tend to think that way.

We have little faith in the beginning, the end, and the plot—both the plot of all of space and time and the plot of the Bible.

Most tend to think the Bible is a smattering of good advice—kind of like a self-help book containing some knowledge of good and evil from a weird diverse group of people—so you kind of pick and choose what you like.

But what if the Bible is a story that God is telling through a weird diverse group of people, well then it would have an end that was entirely anticipated in the beginning, and everything in it would work to reveal the plot. And you'd want to pay attention to every confusing detail in the story to get the meaning in the end.

Stories do more than give information. A story, like a storehouse, stores meaning. And it reveals people.

If you're hiring an employee—you ask for their resume. But if you want to know a person—you get them to tell you their story.

Stories are incredibly powerful. Information can cause you to change your behavior. But a story can create in you a new desire—a new want, a new heart. A story can make a person want what they did not want before. Tell a child your story, and you can shape a heart in your own image for an entire lifetime.

In Revelation 21 we come to the End for the End has come to us. And it turns out the end is the beginning and everything in between. Since the foundation of the world God has been telling a story and it has a plot. The Revelation is the Revelation of the Plot, the Logos, Jesus.

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life...

This is Young's literal translation of what we just read:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, going forth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb: ²in the midst (or middle) of its broad place, and of the river on this side and on that, is a tree of life...

Modern translators try to clean up that confusing sentence, but I think John is seeing something like this:

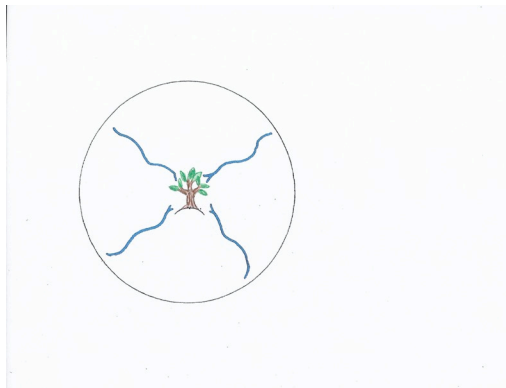


Figure 1

He's seeing the tree of life in the middle of the garden of Eden. So, we're at the end and looking at the beginning. That tells us that the Bible and all things with it, are one great story.

As a kid and a science geek I always struggled with end and even more the beginning of Scripture. I mean, where was this silly garden, what's up with these ridiculous trees and why would God do such a thing? But now I see that the beginning and the end are the edge of spacetime and eternity—so asking, “when and where is the garden of Eden?” or “when and where is the New Jerusalem?” is not like asking, “when and where is Cleveland, Ohio?”

The Garden is at the edge of when and where, so when and where could be any place that eternity touches time, including the depths of my own soul.

He sees a tree and a river, that branches into rivers “on this side and on that,” just like the river in Eden that branched into four “on this side and that.”

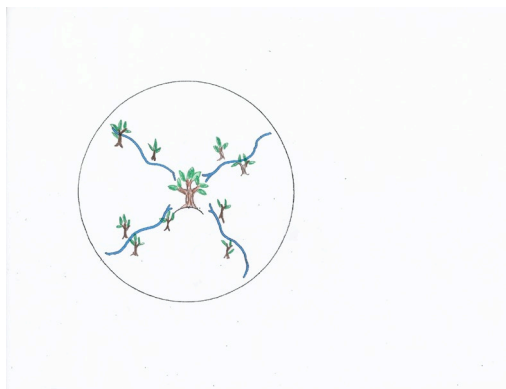


Figure 2

He sees a tree and a river and more trees—trees that are really the same tree, the tree of Life.

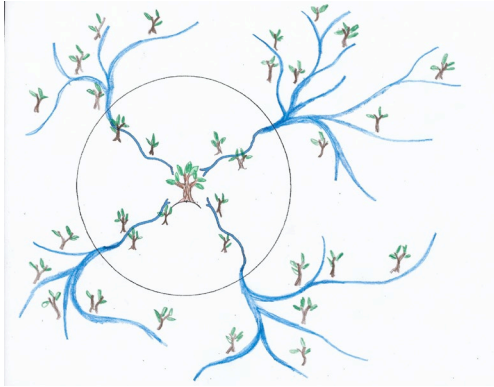


Figure 3

And now this is weird, and I can't draw it well, but in Genesis 2:10 the river flows "out of Eden to water the garden." And there it becomes four rivers—the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Gihon that appears to be the Nile, and one other river that hasn't been identified...

In Ezekiel the river starts small and gets deeper the further it flows and wherever the river flows it brings healing and life (Ez. 47).

In Daniel the kingdom of the Son of man strikes the earth like a meteor, destroying the beast, becoming a great mountain and then filling the world (Daniel 2:31-45).

See it's like the whole world it destined to become the garden, and a city on a mountain, that is a temple, and a bride, and a body... That's quite a story.

...the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.

A tree is a pretty amazing thing. With its leaves it absorbs light and mixes it with dirt and poop, making life and even fruit. With all the knowledge in the world you can't make one piece of fruit. But a tree makes fruit out of dirt and poop by mixing it with light—and God is light.

The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faith, and Self-control. Each like a new desire we could not create...but maybe a tree could create.

...the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

(not "some nations" or part of each nation, just "the nations.")

³ No longer will there be anything accursed...

"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" says God in Deuteronomy (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13).

A tree can make life or be used as an instrument of death.

³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true..."

¹⁰ And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evil doer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy...

What a statement: You can't make people want what they don't want.

You can't make anyone want to go to heaven. If we had read this during the Crusades or the Inquisition we might have saved people a lot of trouble.

You can't make anyone want to go to heaven. But maybe a story can—or the plot to a story—a Word, like a seed planted in the dung and dirt of the human heart. A Word that grows like a tree. A Word that's "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword cutting to the division of soul and spirit... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

¹¹ “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.”

It's just like Paul writes in Romans 11:32 “God consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all.” Christ repays our sin with His Mercy. And the particular shape of our disobedience, determines the particular shape of God's mercy in us. Mercy fills you like wine fills an empty earthen vessel or blood fills a blood vessel—the Mercy flows from a tree that is also the throne. On the throne stands a lamb, “newly slain”ⁱ from “the foundation of the earth.” From the throne flows a river of life—eternal life—and the life is in the blood.

¹³ “I am the Alpha and the Omegaⁱⁱ, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

In Revelation 7:14 we read about saints, coming out of the great tribulation that washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.ⁱⁱⁱ “Come reason with me,” says the Lord through Isaiah (1:10), “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” In Rev. 2:7 to the angel of the church in Ephesus, Jesus says “to the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God.” It was to Ephesus that Jesus said, “You've lost your first love.” To conquer is to love because you want to; it is to love in freedom.

Blessed, happy, are those who wash their robes in the blood of the lamb—white as snow. Blessed is Snow White. It's quite a story.

And if you believe it's a story that has an author that actually knows what He's doing, it raises an obvious question, that doesn't even occur to most folks these days.

The question is: “*Where's the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil?*”

Gen. 2:9 “...the tree of the life was in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”—That's knowledge of *tob* and *ra* in Hebrew, knowledge of beauty and corruption, Good and evil.

The Tree of Life and The Tree of knowledge are both in the middle of the Garden, on the 6th day of creation, when God makes Adam in his image. But Now, it seems that John only sees a tree of life.

Where's the tree of knowledge?

"Everything created by God is good" writes Paul, "And nothing is to be rejected if it is received with Thanksgiving" (I Tim. 4). Wouldn't that include the tree of Knowledge?

Jesus just said, "Behold I make all things new... it is done, it is finished."

We just read, "No longer will there be anything accursed..."

"The day you eat of it you will surely die," said God, to Adam on the 6th day of creation. Well, John is no longer looking at the 6th day, but the eternal 7th day when everything is good and it is finished.

So where's the tree of knowledge, and what's the tree of knowledge? and how come "no longer will (or can) anyone be accursed?"

What does it mean to take from the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil?

There are a million ways to describe it, but basically it means this:

Clip from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
Walt Disney Productions, 1937

Slow zoom on an idyllic fairy tale castle. High, dissonant violins set an ominous mood. A slowly descending series of notes on the harp accompanies our transition from sunshine and ether to a darkened room, a phosphorescent mirror, and the clandestine ritual of a narcissistic monarch.

Queen: Slave in the Magic Mirror, come from the farthest space, through wind and darkness I summon thee. Speak! Let me see thy face.

Flames fill the mirror, then subside to reveal a floating eldritch mask, wreathed in smoke.

Mirror: What wouldst thou know, my queen?

Queen: Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?

Mirror: Famed is thy beauty, majesty. But hold, a lovely maid I see. Rags cannot hide her gentle grace. Alas, she is more fair than thee.

Queen: Alas for her! Reveal her name.

Mirror: Lips red as the rose. Hair black as ebony. Skin white as snow.

Queen: Snow White!

The Evil Queen wants knowledge of the Good, so she can judge whether or not she is Good, and if not, make herself Good, make herself *tob* in Hebrew. It means beautiful.

And you know the story: she doesn't make herself beautiful but ugly—on the outside and on the inside. She actually orders the huntsman to bring to her the heart of Snow White so she can keep it in a box.

In John 1, John tells us that Jesus comes from "the bosom of the Father." Jesus is the heart of God.

Well, if a person wants knowledge of good and evil, what do they want? Usually they want a description of the Good, so they can judge if they themselves are good and try to make themselves Good. They want the law. They want God's law.

And by that I don't just mean the ten commandments, I mean any law—it could even be your score on the enneagram, if that's the way you take it. Paul writes, that “when gentiles, who don't have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves... it's written on their hearts.” It's all God's law, or an attempt at capturing God's law, on paper, stone, or maybe in a box—like a coffin. Or an ark. In Hebrew, it's the same word (*aron*).

The law isn't bad, and the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil isn't bad. God made it, but “the day you eat of it, dying you will die.”

To understand what it is and how it works we can just read Romans chapter 7 substituting “the knowledge of Good and evil” for “the law.”

Romans 7:7 What then shall we say? That *the knowledge of good and evil* is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for *the knowledge of good and evil*, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if *the knowledge of good and evil* had not said, “You shall not covet.”⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from *the knowledge of good and evil*, sin lies dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from *the knowledge of good and evil*, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.¹⁰ The very commandment—

You know, Jesus said “[God's] commandment is eternal life” (John 12:50). That's amazing. But listen to this sentence.

¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So *the knowledge of good and evil* is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

The Law revealed to Eve, and that first Adam, that something was not good. Before the fall, God had already said, “It's not good for the Adam to be alone.” Adam was alone, and he didn't even know what alone and not alone was. For he did not know what Good and evil are. He did not know Love. And Love is Life.

Adam ate and died. Paul writes that we are dead. So when did we eat and die?

Did you notice what Paul wrote: “I was once alive apart from the law”? So there was a time before he had “the knowledge of good and evil.” In Deuteronomy 1:39 God tells the Israelites that their children do not yet have the knowledge of Good and evil.

In Luke 22, hanging on a tree in a garden on the sixth day of creation, sixth day of the week, around the sixth hour of the day, Jesus cries “Father forgive them they know not what they do.”

They did not have knowledge of Good and evil, but they were taking it... weren't they? In John 15:22, Jesus says, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for sin.” He exposed their sin.

It's like Jesus is the Good hanging on a tree and each of us has taken from that tree...but when did we take that knowledge from that tree?

You know I think I remember that day with each of my kids. Psychologist say that an infant sees him or herself entirely mirrored in the eyes of his or her mother or father—they don't perceive a separation. I've told you that when my kids were little, they lived in the light of my eyes. They were literally the *ishown*, the little man, the apple of my eye, reflected in my eyes. They saw themselves in my eyes and they were perfectly at rest in who they are. Singing, dancing, playing...

But in each of them a day came when they stopped being simply so beautiful...and they began to ask, "Am I beautiful?" And they looked in another mirror.

They began to judge themselves and make themselves not quite so beautiful, trying to be beautiful.

They began to judge themselves and everyone around them.

They began to try and earn what they already had—my love.

In C.S. Lewis's novel *Perelandra*, satan tempts Eve by showing her for the first time, her face, in a mirror.

"Oh—oh," she cried. "What is it? I saw a face."

"Only your own face, beautiful one," said the Un-man.

"My face—out there—looking at me... What is it?"

"...The mysteries had all vanished from her face," writes Lewis. "It was as easy to read as that of a man in a shelter when a bomb is coming."

"What is it?" she repeated.

"It is called Fear," said the mouth [of the satan, the accuser], and then grinned.

When I take knowledge of the good and judge myself, I create two selves. The self I think I should be and the self I am. I create a false self I try to project to the world, and then my true-self becomes imprisoned in that false self—hiding in fig leaves, which I now think make me who I am.

The law gives me knowledge of the good, but the law can't make me good. In fact, it makes me bad, dead, and eventually very ugly.

The law can't make me good, but it can describe what the good might look like. The law might say, "Communion is good; drunkenness is bad. Or two drinks is good, but three drinks is bad. Two drinks is heaven, and three drinks is hell." That's a bit crazy-making.

But you see, if I need the law to be good, it just reveals that I'm not good—right? Cause I don't freely choose the good, in fact I must be constrained in order to chose the good, which is not good and not free. If I need the law to be good, it will reveal that I'm not good, AND it will make me hate the good, which is the law.

I used to actually do this at Macaroni Grill—where they'd let you fill up your own glass of wine on the honor system. The honor system made me dishonorable. I'd fill two glasses to the very

brim, resenting the fact that I had only two and coveting three, but I'd tell myself I was being good, while I was teaching my heart to be bad—to be ugly.

See? Maybe the difference between Good and Bad isn't about how much wine you drink, but the way in which you drink it.

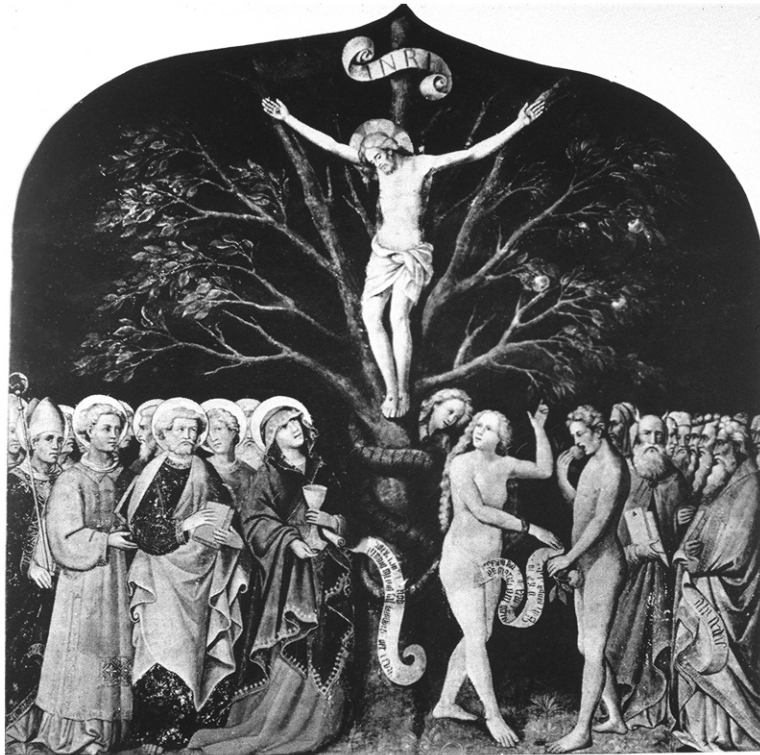


Figure 4 "The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

What's this?

Is this the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil?

Maybe it depends on how you take it and drink it.

Jesus is the "fulfillment of the law," and He is the Good in flesh, and He is the judgment of God. So how do you take him?

Is he a standard that you try to live up to? I mean:

- A judgment that simply tells you when you're bad, so you try harder to be good?
- Like a WWJD bracelet, so you look at Jesus and when you see that you're not doing what Jesus would do, you just try harder to do what Jesus would do?
- Some people think this is a test—so if you don't make yourself in His image, you'll go to hell and if you do make yourself in His image, you'll go to heaven.
- Some people think it's a test to see if you can judge what's good and what's not good—so if you judge Jesus to be good, that's called faith, and you get in to heaven...and if you can't judge that he is good, well, then you're an idiot and will be tortured for all eternity.

So is this the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil...or is this the tree of Life?

Maybe it depends on how you take it...or receive it.

So what's the tree of life? The tree of knowledge is like a mirror and I suspect the tree of Life is also like a mirror, but you look at it in a different way, asking a different question, and wishing a different wish...a new "want."^{iv} Maybe like this:

Second clip from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
Walt Disney Productions, 1937

Snow White sings into a wishing well, which magically echoes back only those phrases less than four syllables in length.

Snow White: I'm wishing *[I'm wishing]*
For the one I love
To find me *[To find me]*
Today *[Today]*

I'm hoping *[I'm hoping]*
And I'm dreaming of
The nice things *[The nice things]*
He'll say *[He'll say]*

We see a handsome prince, roaming about on a white steed (as handsome princes are wont to do). He appears to have heard Snow's song.

For the reprise of the first verse, we see only that which is reflected in the pristine surface of the well water. Snow White continues singing down into the well.

I'm wishing *[I'm wishing]*
For the one I love
To find me *[To find me]*
Today

We expect to hear Snow's high, warbly soprano echoing a descending major 3rd. But no! the face of the handsome prince pops into the picture next to Snow's, and his heroic tenor voice provides the echo. But it is not a true echo; he inverts the motif with an ascending 3rd, landing on the fifth scale degree (as handsome princes are wont to do):

Prince: Today!
Snow White: (startled) Oh!

Did you notice a difference?

The queen wants to take the Good, possess the Good and make herself Good. Snow White wants the Good...to find her and love her. Then she'd know the Good because the Good knew her.

The queen thinks that the good is a thing and so the face she sees in the mirror is death. Snow White thinks the Good is a prince—not dead, but alive—her mirror is a hope, that turns into his eyes looking back at her.

The queen is stuck on herself, trapped alone within herself. Snow White has lost herself... and Snow White is found.

Snow White doesn't try to be good, she just is good—she's beautiful. For Snow White the Good is a Life—the Life who is her Prince. The Good is more than *what* the good does; the Good is *who* the Good is. The Prince is the Good and the Good is the Prince...

So, if Snow White is Good—how does she get the good inside of her?

She could kill him and eat him. But there is another way.

In Scripture there are two ways of "knowing." One results in death and the other results in babies.

I'm not trying to be crass, Bride of Christ... I'm trying to preach the Gospel to foolish virgins and women that have been abused by men who claimed to be good, but were in fact, evil.

Jesus is the Good in flesh and Jesus is the Life.

So anyway, we were asking "Where's the tree of knowledge and What is the tree of Life... in the middle of the garden?"

In his Gospel, John goes out of his way to point out that Jesus was crucified in a garden (19:41). And that when Mary found him on Easter morning she thought he was the gardener. And you might remember that Adam was a gardener. Jesus is called the *eschatos* Adam, and we are his bride.

And I hope you remember what we said last time:

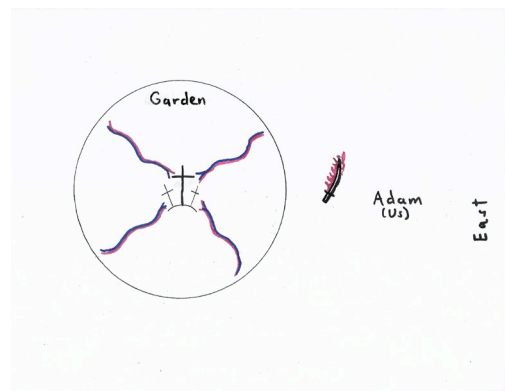


Figure 5

The Garden is also The New Jerusalem.

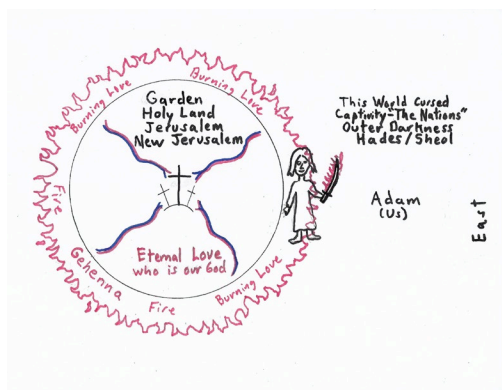


Figure 6

that is also a tabernacle and a temple.

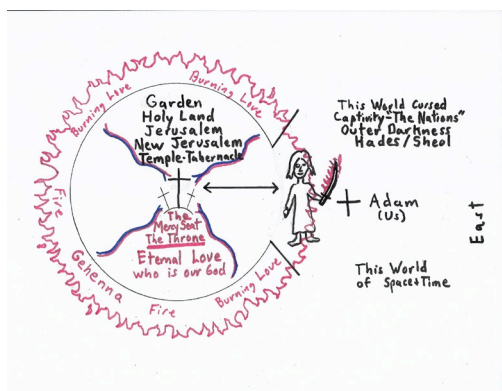


Figure 7

that contains the throne, which is the law in a box (or a coffin), covered in Mercy, on which now stands The Slaughtered Lamb.

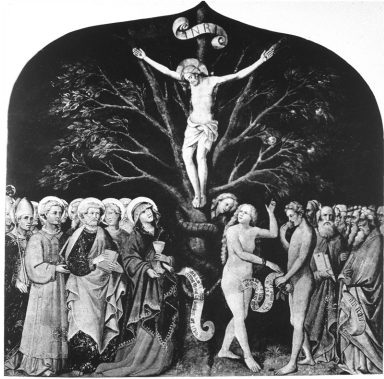
And you know that John always picture Jesus as enthroned upon a tree.

John sees a tree, but John doesn't used the normal word for tree (*dendron*). He uses an abnormal word for tree that can also be translated wood, gallows, or cross. When Peter, Luke, and Paul all point out that Jesus was crucified and cursed on a tree they all use the same word: *Skulon*.

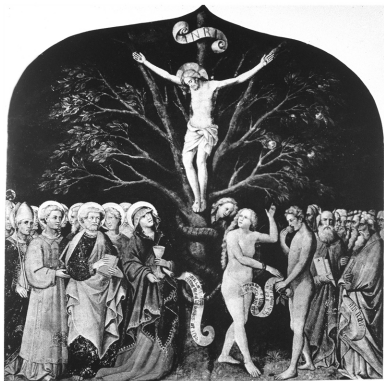
I don't hear modern preachers talking this way, but I know that our ancestors thought this way because you can find all sorts of ancient paintings of Jesus crucified on a tree. The tree of Life, and maybe even sometimes the tree of knowledge.

And that makes sense doesn't it? Jesus is "The Life." There's only one Life. And that means "your life" is actually His Life. Jesus is the Life and He said, "None is Good, but God alone." God is the Good, and God in flesh is Jesus: Jesus is the Good in flesh.

So the tree of life looked like this:



And the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil must've looked like this.



The Good is God and the evil is the absence of God...Or maybe, taking the Life of God like fruit from a tree.

Well there were two trees in one spot (the middle of the garden). Or there was one tree, that looked like two.^v

Whatever the case, I think it's the Judgment of God.

You know we tend to think that God is Two—sometimes we call it Love and Justice—which we define as “not love”.

We think that God is two, but maybe God is One and his judgment is one, and we are two. Maybe we tried to judge the judgment and cut ourselves on the flaming sword that's guarding the way to the Tree of Life.^{vi}

The tree is the Judgment.

And now, if you understand what I'm saying, you might be starting to panic. You might be thinking: “Maybe it's too late! Maybe I was Snow White when I was little, but I've been eating from the tree of knowledge for fifty years...and I'm getting old and ugly!”

Yes, that's correct. God said, “The day you eat of it, dying you will die.”
You live in a world under a curse, you will die, and your body will turn to dust.

I thought you knew that already. We get so freaked out that God would smite people, burn their bodies and they'd turn to dust... But I thought we knew that already.

You know, even Snow White didn't stay snow white. Unable to trap Snow White's heart in a box, the Evil Queen actually made herself ugly in order to trick Snow White and tempt her with a poison apple. Rather than waiting for the one she loves, the Queen tempts Snow White to seize control of the one she loves...

You see, the magic fruit works like her magic mirror: it gives her power over Love—or at least that's the lie.

Third clip from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
Walt Disney Productions, 1937

The Queen, disguised as a hideous old crone, tempts Snow White with a plump, juicy apple.

Queen: This is no ordinary apple. It's a magic wishing apple.

Snow White: A wishing apple?

Queen: Yes! One bite and all your dreams will come true.

Snow White: Really?

Queen: Yes, girlie. Now, make a wish...and take a bite.

You can't blame Snow White. Because she was an idiot. And you really can't blame my children, because they were idiots. All little children are idiots...innocent, adorable, idiots.

They're adorable idiots—we love them and don't want them to ever suffer pain, but we also want them to grow up and choose to love us in freedom. We want them to know the Good, and freely choose the Good. We want them to learn to love, even though the lesson can hurt like hell and take a lifetime.

You can't blame Snow White and two-year-olds, because they don't know better. And you really can't blame Eve and that first Adam... because they didn't know better. They didn't have the knowledge of Good and evil. So when God said "the day you eat of it dying you will die," how were they to know that the Word of God is Good, so they could trust the Word of God, who is Good, and find their helper?

And when God said, "It's not Good for ha Adam (that is humanity) to be alone," how were they to know it is not good to be alone? How could they recognize their Helper and want their Helper, Who is the Good and is the Life...and is standing right next to them in the garden?

You know, Snow White wishes for what she already has but doesn't know she has—the Love of her Prince.

Fourth clip from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
Walt Disney Productions, 1937

Snow White holds the apple aloft as she fleshes out the details of her wish.

Snow White: ...and that he will carry me away to his castle...where we will live happily ever after.

Queen: (*urgently*) Fine! Fine! Now, take a bite.

Snow White: Oh! I feel strange.

The murderous hag rubs her hands together in malevolent glee, ecstatically muttering through the progression of symptoms as the poison runs its course.

Queen: Her breath will still.

Snow White: Oh...

Queen: Her blood congeal.

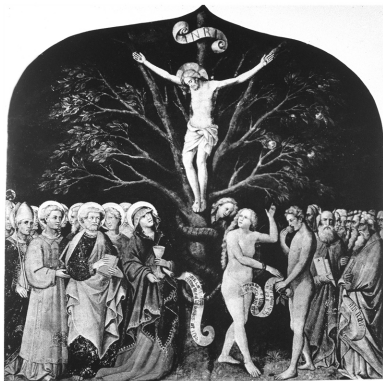
Snow White: Oh...

Snow White gasps and falls on the floor. The apple rolls out of her outstretched hand, whole except for the place where Snow took that fateful bite.

In the bible it's a little unclear as to whether eating of the tree put Eve to sleep or whether she was already asleep, for God had already put the Adam to sleep to teach them a lesson. Remember?

God put the Adam to sleep and made Adam male and female to teach us about Christ and the Church, that is Himself and us, the eschatos Adam and his Bride. He put us to sleep, to perform a surgery, and help us find our Helper. It was heart surgery.

Now you may say, "OK Humanity is the Bride and I see her there, in the Garden. And God in flesh is the Groom, the Helper...but where is Our Helper?"



Well do you see? I think He's hanging on this tree

He's hanging on this tree and I think it's the edge of time and eternity. The Judgment of God. John already told us that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. It means that God has been telling one story all along. And stories have the power to create, in people, a new desire—a new heart.

Last time we saw that you can't go to heaven unless you want to go to heaven. So the question isn't do you want to go to heaven, but how can you want what you don't want. How can you want to go to heaven?

Well maybe someone needs to tell you a story, or better yet, write you into their story. And I think that's just what the Revelation, and the Bible, is all about:

We took the knowledge of Good from the tree and so took the life from the tree. Everything got ugly, for the good died and we died. In fact, God kicked us out of the garden so that we would

die and wouldn't take again^{vii} from the tree of life and live forever—forever feeding on the Life the way the evil Queen fed on Snow White, the way zombies feed on body broken, and vampires feed on bloodshed. Feeding, and feeding, and feeding. Never dying and never living.

He kicked us out of the Garden and subjected (or had subjected) creation to futility in hope. He consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all.

He put two naked idiots in a garden with talking snake and a terrible tree, that He might tell us the story of redemption and create in us his very own heart.

He cast us into the outer darkness,
so that in the darkness His light might shine.
So that we might nail his Heart to a tree and see that he bleeds a river of relentless love that is eternal life.
So that we might take his life, and he might give his life, that we would come to know that He is good and forever choose the good in freedom...
That we might love as he has always loved us.

You see the cross was never plan B, but always plan A.

Jesus didn't die because you made a bad decision.
Jesus died and rose to create in you a good decision.

God's Love is not dependent on our free will.
Our good free will is dependent on the Relentless Love of God.

The cross is not what God needed in order to love us.
The cross is what we needed in order to love God.

God's Judgment does not change; but we change because of God's Judgment.
The tree in the garden does not change; but we change because of the tree. "We die with Him and rise with Him," writes Paul. The cross reveals the judgment of God; and it creates the judgment of God in us.

Our judgment is to take the Life, and possess the Life, which is to damn the Life. ("The blood congeals." Did you hear the evil Queen?)
God's judgment is to give the life, which creates a river of life, which brings all creation to Life.

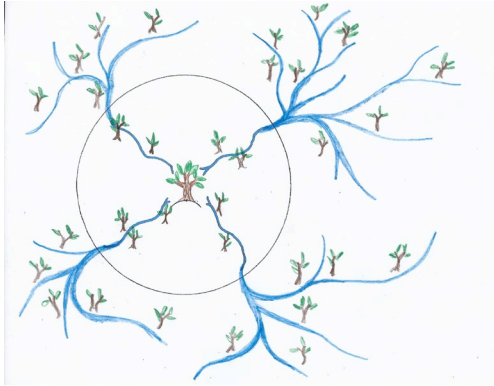
In the Garden we took the Life, damned the life and damned ourselves.
On the Cross, God revealed that the life we took, he had always given—in fact fore-given from the foundation of the world.

And now, Revelation 22, we're back at the garden. And to enter the garden is to return the life you stole from the tree. It is to surrender the Life because you want to surrender the Life. Jesus is the will to surrender your life; Jesus is the will to Love.

To enter is to lose your life and find it.
It's to love as you have been loved—to Love in freedom.
It is a new and eternal desire, a new want, a new will, a free will—It's the will of God in you; it's Jesus in you His Bride, His Temple, His Body.

It's Jesus in you and you in Him—the body of Christ.

Remember what John and Ezekiel saw?



The river of life flowing from the throne—that's where judgment comes from. The Throne.
The river of life flowing from the throne—on which stands a slaughtered lamb.
The river of life flowing from the throne—that is also a tree, that is the revelation of God who is the one who loves in absolute freedom.

He sees the river of life, flowing from the throne and the life is in the blood.

And so he sees something like this.



Every tree is a tree of life and a decision to Love from the throne of God, which is in the temple of God, that is the human soul.

So John sees something like this...

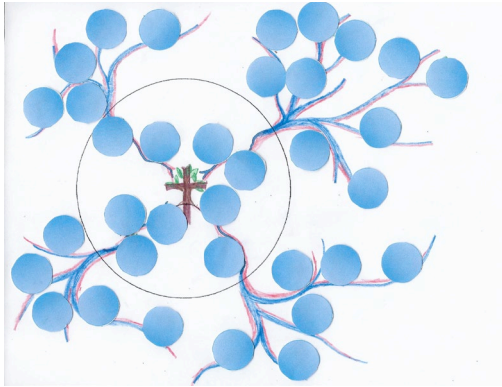


Figure 8

Which I hope reminds you of this...

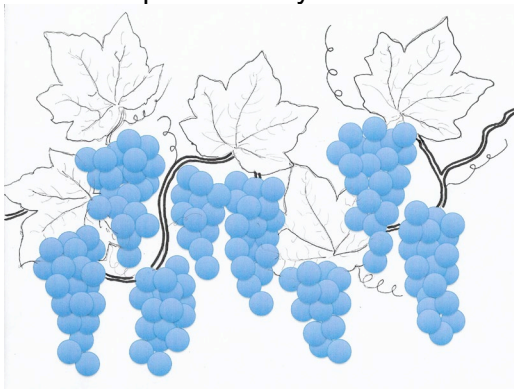


Figure 9

And definitely reminds you of this...

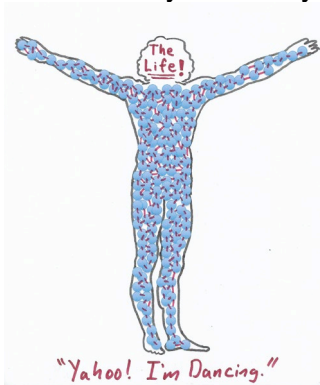


Figure 10

You see a soul that damns the life is a vessel of wrath,
But a soul that surrenders the life is a vessel of mercy, a blood vessel—it constantly loses its life
and finds it, for it channels a river of life that flows from the throne and throughout all creation.

When one person loves in a world that doesn't love it looks like a man hanging on a tree.
When two people love in a covenant of love it's called a good marriage and a great honeymoon.
When all people love, it's the new Jerusalem coming down, an eternal temple, the bride and
body of the Will of God, Who is God and the Word of God.

And now, in case you're thinking, "but it's too late, I've become the Evil Queen!" Well, don't you understand, we've all become the evil queen or dreamt we were the Evil Queen. Every believer is like Snow White trapped in bad dream—the dream of her own sovereignty, the dream that she could conquer love, when Heaven is to be conquered by Love.

When Snow White bites the apple, she falls into the sleep of death. And when we took the fruit we fell into the sleep of death or dreamed that we were dead. We sleep until the prince enters our nightmare and gives us a kiss, waking us from death and giving us the light of life.

Fifth clip from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
Walt Disney Productions, 1937

Snow White is laid out on an ornately-carved bier as though ready for the grave. The Prince approaches. Sustained high strings and a descending four-note melodic figure provide intrigue reminiscent of the slow zoom on the Queen's castle at the beginning. But it is also different: imbued with longing and anticipation and hope against hope...

He kneels and kisses Snow White. The instant his lips touch hers, the music resolves in an unexpected way to a warm, thrumming major chord—the beginning of the main theme, "Someday My Prince Will Come."

The company of mourners are oblivious to the change. As the Prince bows his head to pay his respects, the Seven Dwarfs and all the woodland creatures follow suit. But the melody continues and Snow begins to stir. As she yawns and stretches, the song takes up a quick waltz tempo. Then she and her prince see one another and she reaches out her arms to him.

Cut to a golden evening sky. The Prince is on foot, leading his white horse who carries Snow White. A glittering gold castle appears in the clouds ("Not the old Jerusalem, the new one!" Peter shouts, helpfully), and the heavenly hosts sing out a reprise of the final verse of "Someday My Prince Will Come."

Well that's not just a description of something that happened once in a garden. That's a description of what will happen in every moment of your space and time and is happening, even now, in the sanctuary of your own soul.

With every breath you take and every move you make, you're either looking in this mirror trying to justify yourself...

[image: Evil Queen looking into the Magic Mirror]

...or you're looking in this mirror having forgotten yourself and having found yourself in Him.

[image: Snow White looking into the eyes of the Prince]

Hey, there's a tree *[Peter points at the cross]* and there's a mirror *[he gestures towards the communion table]*.

Communion

On the night he was betrayed by all of us he took bread and broke it saying this is my Body given to you. Take and eat.

And he took the cup saying, this is the covenant in my blood...

A cup of wine. Is it good or evil?

It's good. Actually, it is The Good and The Life. It is the Judgment of God.

Here's the tree [*the cross*]. Here's the throne [*the communion table*]. Here's the Judgment.^{viii}

The Judgment doesn't change.

But how do you take it? Now that could be evil...or Good.

If you take it as a possession, with which you judge yourself and your neighbor—then you're the judge, aren't you?

You're the Evil Queen.

If you receive it as a gift, The Love of God, poured out for you—then the doors of the kingdom are open and the doors of your heart swing open. You're Beautiful.

You're Snow White.

The truth is, right now, you're both. So Go ahead and drink it. For God's Judgment is stronger than your judgment.

It will destroy the Evil Queen: The Heart of God will rise from the dead and burst open the box, just like the veil in the temple ripped from top to bottom. The Blood will burn the Evil Queen and reduce her to dust.

And the Blood will Liberate Snow White: The blood will purify Snow White—that's what blood does in a body. It carries away impurities, decay and death. And it brings healing; it brings life... Jesus is the Life.

Jesus is the Heart of God...Given to you.

Benediction

Everything is created by God, and sanctified when it's received with thanksgiving. So Lord Jesus we say thank you. Thank you for everything. And you make all things new. Thank you that you overcame, and that's how we overcome. In Jesus' name, amen.

You saw the picture. Now you're a tree of life. And fruit starts to grow. And don't be surprised if people come along and take the fruit and eat it and don't even say thank you. That's part of the program. Those people are not your mirror. [The cross] is your mirror.

For 57 years...or maybe 55 or 56...I've been asking myself this question: "am I good? Am I good? Am I good? Am I good?" And it's just about killed me. It's made me dead and ugly.

You can spend your life asking that question: "am I good? Am I good? Am I good?" Just drop it. And just look at the one who is Good. And see Him looking back at you. And that's how you're made in His image.

But you don't have to worry about that. He's the Creator. Not you. Just look at Him.

In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ See Hebrews 10:19-22. Jesus is the "new (prosphatan) and living way." Prosphatan literally means "freshly slain."

ⁱⁱ In Revelation 1:8 the Lord God said, "I am the alpha and omega." Jesus and the Lord God say the same thing. They are "the alpha and omega;" they are one.

ⁱⁱⁱ It's rather bizarre that folks want to be raptured before the tribulation, when it's in tribulation that you learn to wash your robe in the blood of the lamb.

Remember what God said through Hosea?

He would conquer his whoring bride in the valley of achor, the valley of trouble... and there she would learn to call him "my husband."

^{iv} James 1:23-25

^v "She dare not come within a hundred miles of the Tree, for its smell, which is joy and life and health to you, is death and horror and despair to her."

Everyone was staring solemnly at the Tree when Aslan suddenly swung round his head (scattering golden gleams of light from his mane as he did so) and fixed his large eyes on the children. "What is it, children?" he said, for he caught them in the very act of whispering and nudging one another.

"Oh-Aslan, sir," said Digory, turning red, "I forgot to tell you. The Witch has already eaten one of those apples, one of the same kind that Tree grew from." . . .

"So we thought, Aslan," she said, "that there must be some mistake, and she can't really mind the smell of those apples."

"Why do you think that, Daughter of Eve?" asked the Lion.

"Well, she ate one."

"Child," he replied, "that is why all the rest are now a horror to her. That is what happens to those who pluck and eat fruits at the wrong time and in the wrong way. The fruit is good, but they loathe it ever after."

"Oh I see," said Polly. "And I suppose because she took it in the wrong way it won't work with her. I mean it won't make her always young and all that?"

"Alas," said Aslan, shaking his head. "It will. Things always work according to their nature. She has won her heart's desire; she has unwearying strength and endless days like a goddess. But length of days with **an evil heart** is only length of misery and already she begins to know it. All get what they want: they **do not always like it**. . . .

"And the Witch tempted you to do another thing, my son, did she not?"

"Yes, Aslan. She wanted me to take an apple home to Mother."

"Understand, then, that it would have healed her; but not to your joy or hers. The day would have come when both you and she would have looked back and said it would have been better to die in that illness." .

.. "That is what *would* have happened, child, with a stolen apple. It is not what will happen now. What I give you now will bring joy. It will not, in your world, give endless life, but it will heal. Go. Pluck her an apple from the Tree."

C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1955), p. 173-175

^{vi} Scientists are utterly perplexed by light. They say it's not one but two, a particle and a wave. But maybe light is one and we're two. Maybe we're trying to judge the judgment.

This is the judgment: The Light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light... In fact, we crucified the light and put him in a box—could there be a greater darkness? And we didn't do it just once, He died for the sins of the world, and sin is that way we take knowledge from the tree... like all the time... He died once and for all space and time.

^{vii} In Genesis 3:22 The Hebrew (gam) can be translated such that the passage reads "take also" or "take again/ take again also." I think it should be "take again." The idea being that we need to continue to take from the tree to live. We don't simply receive life and keep life for all eternity; we experience eternal life in a communion of life—the river of life that constantly flows from the throne, that is also a tree.

^{viii} At this table we confess our sin—that we have taken his life to justify ourselves. And we believe God's grace—that God has given his own life that we would be forever justified

At this table God liberates us from the Evil Queen and makes us Snow White.

At this table God reveals the plot that changes the meaning of every moment in our space and time.

At this table God changes our knowledge of sin into the Revelation of His Love.

At this table God tells us the story of His Love.

At this table God creates in us a new heart—his own heart.