

God's Way Out

"For Us and For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

Lesson 2. When They Chose the Other Way

If you have been perplexed to know why so much wickedness exists on the earth now, and if you have wished for a remedy, read in this chapter how evil began, and how God plans to change things.

WHAT a joyous life was that in the Garden of God! Adam and his companion tended the flowers, they trained the young vines; they made their surroundings all that heart could wish.

The future was bright with promise for the new king and queen of Eden. The whole planet offered scope for thoughtful enterprise and happy planning, and they had all the long years of eternity before them for their love and labor.

God had endowed them with His own nature, so that love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, self-control, and faith were natural to them. Never a sharp-tempered word was spoken. Never a note of anger or suspicion arose.

But they were not automatons or robots. Lucifer, the great adversary of God, the fallen angel who had rebelled against the Creator, could not charge Him with having made man incapable of choosing for himself. They were perfectly free; they could choose evil instead of good--if they so wished.

No, not robots. In the garden was another tree which was the proof that Adam and Eve served God of their own free and happy choice. This tree, called "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," was the one and only tree of which God had commanded them not to eat from. "Thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." He had said.

But the tree was within their reach. There was nothing to prevent them from eating from it, except loyalty to God by their own free and happy choice. Who would be content with any other kind of love or loyalty? Would a lover be happy if a reluctant woman were hypnotized into marrying him? Why, one great joy of courtship is: "She chose me when she might have chosen others. She marries me of her own free and happy choice."

Would any wife be happy if her husband stood by her because he was mentally incapable of doing otherwise? Would children be happy if they were forced by threats to profess love to their parents? Never! And that is just the difference between the government of God and the government of Satan. God depends upon the proclamation of His love to win men to choose His kingdom. False religions depend upon compulsion, threats, fear, loss, ridicule, unpopularity.

Happy days in Eden followed peaceful nights, week followed week, and month followed month in the gladness of God's presence with each other's love. All was new and beautiful and curious around them. Their interest was keen as that of a child in new surroundings, while their intelligence was little inferior to the angels.

They had no want to tempt them to steal, no fear to induce them to be untruthful, no lack to tempt them to covet. No need that might induce them to work on the Sabbath, no one to cause pain or suffering. No fear of death or disease. How could they be tempted to do wrong?

The Devil's Plot--Will It Succeed?

Satan--Lucifer, the fallen angel--looked on their happy lot with displeasure. How could he expect to induce them to transfer their loyalty to him?

Obviously there was only one place where he could hope to trap them. The forbidden tree was the place. But how? It was useless to hope to frighten them. He would endeavor to work on Eve's love of beauty--and beguile her by flattery of her own loveliness.

So this fallen spirit entered into the serpent, then a very beautiful creature, possibly gifted with the power of flight. Taking his place by the tree he waited his opportunity. One day, when Eve had wandered off alone, she found herself near the forbidden tree.

She looked on it with curiosity. It was very lovely. "Why has God forbidden us to eat of it?" she wondered. It was the serpent's opportunity. He spoke up, as if incredulous: "Oh, Fairest of the Fair. Hath God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

Eve stared, hearing a serpent speak. "We may eat of every tree of the garden, except this," she answered. "God hath said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

"You shall not surely die," said the tempter scornfully. "Why, if you eat this fruit, your eyes shall be opened and you shall be like gods, knowing good and evil. God knows this; that is why He commands you not to eat of it."

Will She Trust the Devil?

Eve hesitated. Was that, then, the reason? Was God withholding the fruit because He was afraid they might have something of His power?

"The serpent has evidently eaten; he has not died," she reasoned. "Possibly this beautiful fruit has given him the power of speech. Shall I taste--or shall I trust God?" She lingered--always a dangerous procedure in temptation. Taking advantage of her hesitation the serpent pressed the fruit into her hand. A flutter of excitement passed over her--but she felt no harm. Impulsively she tasted--then ate of the fruit.

Still no harm followed. Perhaps she felt an exhilaration like that which sometimes comes to those who sin after long restraint. But not the least sensation of pain arose. She hurried excitedly off to her husband with the tempting fruit.

Adam's Consternation

Adam listened with alarm. He was not deceived. Not he! The serpent was the tempter, he was sure. [1] What should he do? There was Eve, beautiful as ever. Must she die! How could he live without her, should she be taken from him? Life would not be worthwhile without her companionship! "If she must die--then I will die with her," he resolved. He hurriedly took the fruit from her hand, and recklessly followed her example.

What Will Be the Result?

Suddenly they both became aware that the robe of light, token of their innocence and loyalty, was fading away. A little while--and it was gone. Then a sense of chill seemed to come into the garden.

"Our Maker will know. Oh, yes! He will know," said the now frightened Eve to herself. "Oh, what shall we do?"

They hurriedly fashioned some garments of leaves. But if the chill of body went, the chill of the heart remained. A familiar voice sounded over the quiet of the garden--a voice always loved before. "Adam!" it called.

"Hark! That is the voice of God calling." They hid themselves in confusion.

Was there a sound of grief in the Voice which was now calling again? It was heard clearly in the quiet of the garden. "Adam, where art thou?" it called.

There was no hiding possible from those loving but searching eyes. "I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself," Adam responded.

"Has thou eaten of the tree?" asked the Voice--still a loving voice, yet now in their guilt, almost terrifying. What will Adam answer? Will he choose the right and manly path? Will he confess his wrong, endeavor to shield Eve, and take the blame himself? Love and loyalty do such things.

No, he said what once he would have thought impossible:- "The woman."

"The woman Thou gave me," she tempted me, "and I did eat," said he, now the self-excuser, who a little while before would have died for her. This is what sin does.

And she, left to herself, said that which she never would have said before:- "The serpent."

"The serpent," he "beguiled me, and I did eat."

Thus they excused their sin.

What Had They Done?

Eve disobeyed God and believed Satan. She disbelieved the Father of all good, and believed the father of evil. She distrusted Him who loved her, who had provided all to give her happiness, and she trusted instead him who had sought her destruction. She chose to cast off her loyalty to God, and chose the way of the father of lies. And Adam did the same, and then endeavored to throw the blame on Eve, and on God.

The Sentence of Justice

"And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou has done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shall thou go, and dust shall thou eat all the days of thy life:

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise His heel.

"Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shall bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

“And unto Adam He said, Because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and has eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake. In sorrow shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

“Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shall eat the herb of the field;

“In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return.” [2]

Sadly thus spoke God to the erring children of His love. They must leave the garden, He said, and the tree of life. They must face toil, and experience pain, and finally, death.

Had they been left to themselves forever that would have been the end of their lot. For the wages of sin is death--for eternity. [3] Unless some miracle were performed, never again would the joy of a sinless heart in happy Eden be theirs. They would perish. After death they would never taste the joy of each other's company again.

God's Love Will Find a Way Out

But because God so loved the world, He would give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. [4] The Son of God would suffer a cruel death that they might live again for ever. If they henceforth chose to be His, and trusted in His sacrifice for them, they would one day be raised from the dead and be restored to Eden together with a multitude of their trusting children.

Probably when Adam and Eve understood that the plan for their salvation called for the death of the Son of God, they felt how great was God's love for them, and how great was their sin. If only they could turn back the course of time and begin again, how different things would be!

But now, they must leave those beautiful groves where so much happiness had come to them. Cherubim with flaming swords were stationed there to bar the way to the tree of life. Sadly they left the garden. “Our beautiful home!” wept Eve. “Our beautiful home!”

Why They Must Leave Their Home

If Adam and Eve and their descendants had been allowed continued access to the Tree of LIFE, they would have lived for ever. Eating of its fruit from day to day,

they would never grow feeble or old. This would be a boon worth more than caskets of diamonds if men were always loyal and helpful to one another.

But if men continued in sin--what then? Who would wish that murderous Cain or cruel Nero should live forever, ever growing more fiendish? Who would desire that the brutal Sennacherib, the scheming Pharaoh should prolong their cruel days? Who would wish to extend forever the life of the murderous baby-killers, the freedom-suppressors, the torturers, deceivers, and adulterers of our own day? They would be ever growing in fiendishness as their years increased. No, it was in mercy to the world that sinners were excluded from the tree of life.

But What Was the Outside World Like?

In itself there was little "punishment" to Adam and Eve in being sent into the world outside the garden. True, there was a curse now resting on the ground. Thorns and thistles began to grow, and men would have to till the earth in the sweat of the brow. But it had been cursed "for man's sake," so that the extra labor now involved would keep him from an idleness which would have been disastrous under the new conditions. Invigorating victory over thorn and thistle after hard battle would inspire him in the conflict against the thorns and thistles which grow too soon in the human heart.

It had always been God's plan that man should multiply and completely fill the earth. From the beginning it had been His design that they should spread out from Eden and fashion the whole earth after the mode of the garden. The plains and valleys of the whole world were still in their primeval beauty and fruitfulness. So even now, outside its angel-guarded gates, if they chose to be loyal to God and their fellow men who should be born, Adam and Eve and their descendants would live in rich plenty, and life might go forward with gladness and song for centuries. Life might still be full of blessing.

What Course Would They Now Choose?

Alas! Cain, Earth's first-born, chose to harbor jealous feelings against his brother Abel; and in a fit of temper killed him. What tears and sadness came to Eve as a result! Her son Abel lay motionless in death. Her first-born was a murderer.

Then Lamech chose to marry two wives, Adah and Zillah. Others followed his example, and as a result a tide of sharp voiced bickering, jealousy, and crime has flowed through Eastern homes ever since. Sin often seems to be but a trivial thing. The light of time's lantern always shows it to be an accursed thing.

The next few centuries began to reveal the harvest which choosing sin always brings in its train. And surely we of the twentieth century need no one to convince us that sin leads to untold misery. Sin is a horrible thing. We have seen too much of its fruit in the cruel destruction of war, the young widow's tears and orphan children's grief. We know!

The "Law of Sin and Death"

Cain's choice of violence was imitated by thousands of others in the old world, until God was forced to end it all by the Flood. They made force their choice--the fist, the club, the knife, the sword - until the whole earth was filled with murder, robbery, and violence. Under Satan's rule it seemed to become a law of man's being to choose to do the wicked and cruel thing. [5]

If only someone could give men a new nature, give them back the spirit of Eden, so that they would always choose to do right, what a boon it would be! A new nature! The nature of God! That would be the way out. [6]

But What Miracle-Worker Can Give a New Nature?

Thank God, the Lord Jesus Christ can. If we turn our back on sin and invite Him to come into our poor hearts, He will take possession of us and give us His own loving and helpful nature. This is "conversion."

Then as day by day we choose to do His will, trust in Him, love Him, and copy Him, He will restore in us the nature of the sinless pair in the garden--His own nature.

This is the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. This "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," makes us free from "the law of sin and death," which was in us.'

The Garden Will Appear Again

At the time of the Flood the Garden of Eden disappeared. Men sought its groves and its marvelous tree of life, but found it not. Four great rivers were named after those near the garden, but the four divisions of the river that flowed through those valleys ablaze with blossoms were gone.

That beautiful place which was to be the garden-like metropolis of the earth, "Mother of us all," had disappeared. But in his visions of the future, Isaiah the prophet saw her again, thronged with happy beings, as God had planned at the foundation of the earth. "Sing!" he cried to her with joy.

“Sing, O barren, thou that did not bear,” Isaiah exclaimed; “break forth into singing thou that did not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, said the Lord.”

“Thou shall forget the shame of thy youth,” rang out the cheering, comforting voice.

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee,” came the glad promise of God. **[8]**

Yes, God's glorious way leads right out of sin--and out of the ruin and disappointment left by the Flood, into Eden restored. And in the years that have intervened between lost Eden and our own time He has shown Himself always able to make a way out of every present difficulty and perplexity which the reign of sin has brought. Look up, you whose heart is sad or anxious because of some loss or some perplexity. Both you and your dear ones are precious to the Father in heaven. He will make your path clear and will cause your sorrows to vanish as you trust in Him and walk cheerfully in His way. **[9]**

He knows the way to restore Eden in your heart as well as in the earth. **[10]**

God's Way Out--read in the narratives which follow how He opened the way out for those who trusted in Him.

REFERENCES:

1. 1 Timothy 2:14;
2. Genesis 3: 14-19;
3. Romans 6:23
4. John 3:16;
5. Romans 7:21;
6. 2 Peter 1:4;
7. Romans 8: 2;
8. Isaiah 54:1,4,7
9. Isaiah 43:1, 2, 4
10. Deuteronomy 11: 21.

