

In Jesus' name. Amen.

As follows in Jesus' name:

Genesis 3:22-24

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever —" therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. ^(ESV)

St. Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

People Loved by God,

On the sixth day, when the Lord created Adam, He'd prepared a beautiful garden, a perfect paradise. Originally, the Lord noted for Adam two very specific trees in the midst of the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

There were promises attached to both of them:

To eat of the Tree of Life would give you eternal life, which he had already having no sin. ^{Genesis 2:17}

To eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil... **"on the day you eat of it, you will surely die."**

And on the day that they ate of that 2nd tree, he did die, spiritually.

Because he did not trust God's Word, nor did he regard it as holy,

but instead listened to the voice of his wife, who in turn was deceived by the devil, his soul was separated from God by this sin...

and sin's deadly corruption entered not only his soul, but also his physical life.

From that day on, death and destruction became the fate of all the physical creation.

...Except that there could have been a way out of that physical death.

This way, too, was part of God's Word.

Instead of dying, Adam could have eaten of the Tree of Life and lived forever.

And yet, God had very purposefully and effectively closed the gate to paradise for Adam so that neither he nor his children would have access to the Tree of Life.

But why? Why would God not want Adam to eat now of the Tree of Life and live forever?

Is it because He hated man now and wanted to be rid of us?

Was God just being petty, throwing a tantrum and withholding this gift?

Or was God acting according to His very gracious nature?

Undoubtably, it is this last one.

Eating of the Tree of Life would have been the quick fix.

It would have allowed Adam and his children to live forever;

but he would have lived forever in his sin,

with no reprieve from the hate, the lust, the sorrow, the toil, the pain, and the guilt.

It would have been hell on earth.

Despair would reign as you hope for an end to it all, but no end would come.

As it was, Adam lived to be 930 years.

Living to such an old age would certainly be different.

Obviously, he did not age as fast as we do now, & living as a 30 year old into your 300s sounds great, but consider how difficult that would be?

How easy would it be to think of yourself as immortal for the first 450 years of your life, and the longer you live, the less you think you need to listen to the Word of the Lord; you grow weary of regarding it as sacred and true.

If we struggle to remain faithful for **70, or if by reason of strength, 80** ^{Psalm 90:10} years, think of how difficult it would be for 700 to 800 years.

...

As I minister to 90 year olds, many of them express that they are done with this world, that they eagerly anticipate the Lord's timing to take them out of this veil of tears to eternal glory.

Imagine what it would be like to see, not just your children or grandchildren struggle in life, but your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-granchildren.

To watch this child after that child no longer regard the Lord's word as sacred;

To watch one after another outright reject it, and move away in the direction of Cain.

And to live in a society that had no use for the Lord's morality, and so hatred, corruption, and injustice grow.

Imagine what it would be like to lose an arm or a leg at age 300,

to be diagnosed with cancer at age 2,000 and yet still to have to live with that pain forever, knowing that you would never die, never be rid of that cross.

...

So what grace the Lord showed Adam and man-kind, when He closed that gate to paradise, did not permit Adam to eat of that Tree of Life, and allowed the wages of sin to run its course.

But that closed gate opened up another gate.

As the Lord had promised Adam, by His promise to the devil, a Savior would be born, and would also succumb to the wages of our sin.

The serpent would bruise His heel... He, too, would suffer and die... but not as we do.

He would die, not because of His own sin, but because of ours.

He would suffer at the gates of hells... enduring the separation from God's grace that you deserve, while He hung suspended between heaven and earth.

And so it is through death – through Jesus' death – that our death has been sanctified, and is now the gate by which we enter paradise.

This reality hit the thief dying next to Jesus.

While previously, this son of Adam had reviled Jesus as did the other,

his condemnation not only before Pilate, but also before God, became very real. As he stared at the gates of hell before him, fear filled his heart and caused him to look for a way out. And by God's grace, he merely needed to turn his head and look at his Savior who hung next to him. **"Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom,"** he said, showing that he truly saw Jesus for who He is, the King of Jews, the promised Messiah, the One who would crush the serpent's head, remove the sting of death, and raise the dead to life.

And so, just as the Son of God was there when life gave way to death at the first, so He was there when this man's death gave way to eternal life and the gate of paradise was opened to him...

As the thief, in faith, beheld Jesus as his Savior, Jesus said to him, **"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."**

Do not doubt that the man held these words as sacred, and trusted them even in the face of death.

People loved by God,

Jesus' death is the reason, and the only reason, that our 90 year old members look forward to death.

It's the reason that even as we grieve the death and absences of our loved ones who have died with the sign of faith, we can do so with joy because of their salvation – that they now live forever in glory... in paradise.

It's for this reason that each one of us, instead of being afraid of death, can eagerly anticipate it, knowing that it will release us from all feelings of guilt and sorrow and pain.

Be at peace, your sins are forgiven.

The gate of eternal paradise has been opened to you by your Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria