

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of April 25th, 2021

Sermon: Living in the Tree of Life

Speaker: Pastor Chris Hodges, Lead Pastor of Church of the Highlands

Icebreaker

- When you hear the word “Cajun”, what comes to mind?

Conversation Starters and Sermon Review

- What stands out the most to you from this sermon? What challenged you? Is there anything that you have questions about?

I. Genesis 2:8-9 (NIV)

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

- What was your definition of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil before today’s sermon? How does your definition differ from or mirror the definition shared by Pastor Hodges?

II. Genesis 2:16-17 (NIV)

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 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.”

- We live in a fallen world and know how sin affects us and others. What do you think Adam and Eve thought the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was? Do you think they were naive about it since they didn’t live in a fallen world? How many times do we commit sins thinking we are doing the “right” thing?

III. Genesis 3:1-7 (NIV)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

- Can you recognize a time in your life where you thought you were making the "right decision", but it turned out to be a behavior-centered choice instead of a heart-focused decision?
- Has religion gotten in the way of your relationship with God? How has God broken through those barriers to get to your heart?

IV. Tree of Life versus The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - Do more to get to God.

Tree of Life - Receive what Jesus already did.

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - Try to get God's approval.

Tree of Life - Receive God's love for me.

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - Focuses of the external.

Tree of Life - Focuses on the internal.

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - Obey out of duty

Tree of Life - Obey out of delight.

- What's the "why" behind the reason that you read your Bible? Go to church? Attend a small group?
- Describe ways you've tried to earn God's approval. What would it mean for you to remember that God loves you freely and unconditionally?
- Which tree do you find yourself living in the most? Is your walk focused more on external behavior or on internal changes?
- Have you fallen in love with Jesus? Use 1 Corinthians 13 as reference if needed.

V. How to Live in the Tree of Life

1. Fall in Love with Jesus
2. Respond to sin with Life
3. Guard Our Hearts from Going Back
 - Read John 14:15. Which side of the comma are you living on?
 - Describe the first time you experience God's love. How has it changed you?
 - In your relationships (marriage, parenting, work, friendships), are you showing grace and letting love change them? If not, what can you do differently to share God's grace?
 - What guardrails do you have in place to keep you from falling back into a mindset of going through the motions to please God instead of developing a relationship with God?

Act On It

Encourage: From the very beginning, we were created to be in relationship with God, but then sin entered the world, and now our current reality has been crippled by sin. God saw this and intervened and bridged the gap we could not close on our own with the Blood of Jesus. Because of His love for us, we get to love Him again and our relationship with Him. Galatians 2:21 tells us that if righteousness were obtained through works, then Christ died

for nothing. So find comfort in knowing that we can't disqualify ourselves from his grace nor can we work ourselves to the bone to earn badges of it. God loves us and values that relationship above all. Love him and the rest will follow effortlessly.

Ask: Ask God to erase any thoughts or feelings you have about needing to work your way to God. Pray for discernment to know the tree in which you are currently living and invite God to realign anything that falls short of the Tree of Life. Pray for any loss of innocence or shame to be overcome by God's promises. Pray for a reminder of the grace that God gives you everyday so that you can extend it to others. Finally, pray for God to help you build and fortify guardrails in your life that can keep you from falling prey back to a life focused on your own works rather than relying on the God that can do anything.

Challenge: Take an inventory of your relationship with God. Which tree does it resemble the most? What are some next steps that you can take to move into the Tree of Life? If you need help, ask the group for help. Does grace come first in difficult situations with difficult people? Decide that grace will lead the way when you're dealing with difficult people or difficult times this week.

Prayer Request and Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for giving us your unconditional love. Help us put this lesson into action and give us the wisdom to know when we're straying from you. Help us know when we need to stop trying to control and just surrender. Help us crave your presence above all. Protect us from anything that takes us out of the Tree of Life and keeps us from the things that you have planned for us. Help us live life today in a way that brings honor to your name. Let us find rest in knowing that when we mess up, you extend your grace while we learn the truth. Your truth will always prevail. Amen.