**Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17, 3:1-7, 21-24**

I. The serpent’s strategy

A. Create insecurity in Adam and Eve by getting them to be dissatisfied with God’s provision and distrustful of his character and love for them

B. Offer an alternative to trusting and depending on God: eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

II. What does eating from this tree represent?

A. Questions to consider from the passage

1. Why did God create this tree at all and put it in the middle of the garden (2:9)?

2. Why does eating this tree lead to death, what kind of death, and was God just bluffing when he gave that warning (2:17)?

3. In what sense does eating this tree make humans “like God” and why is that a bad thing (3:5 and 3:22)?

B. Possible answers

1. Eating from this tree gives an understanding of what is good and what is evil.

-But surely simply having an understanding of what is good and evil would be a good thing that God would desire for his creatures.

2. Eating from this tree gives an actual experience of good and evil.

-BUT God knows good and evil (3:22) and surely he hasn’t experienced evil himself in the sense of committing evil/sin

C. An answer to consider

1. To eat from this tree is to claim the right to decide for yourself what is good and what is evil. It is to pursue a knowledge of good and evil independently of God. It’s to say, “I can’t trust God, so I’ll decide for myself what is good and evil, what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false.” Rather than depending on God, it’s being your own god.

2. Analogy: A Christmas Tree

Eating from this tree is like a tree distrusting the ground in which its rooted and deciding to cut itself off from the ground in order to gain more independence

3. This understanding best answers the questions the passage raises

a. This is how they become like God (3:22): They are playing the role in their own lives that only God should play.

b. This is why eating this tree leads to death (2:17). It’s a spiritual death God had in mind. The minute you cut yourself off from God and go it alone, by definition you have cut yourself off from the source of truth and life, which is spiritual death. So God was not bluffing.

c. This explains why God put the tree there in the first place (2:9). It wasn’t just some arbitrary cruel test. He was communicating to them the very essence of the kind of relationship he wanted with them. All the blessings of Eden were theirs to enjoy with one condition: that they simply trust and depend on him as their creator and source of blessing rather than trying to play the role of God themselves.

III. This is our story today

A. At the root of every sin we commit is an underlying posture that says, “I’m not going to trust God. I’ll decide for myself what is good and what will bring satisfaction in life.”

B. Consider God’s Word and what it says to us about how to life, and consider how we subtly and sometimes even subconsciously decide that we know better.

C. Examples

1. Financial decisions (Lk 12:15, 1 Tim 6:9-10)

2. Relational decisions (Mt 20:25-28)

3. Decisions about image and beauty (1 Pt 3:3-5)

4. Decisions about driving on the freeway! (Mt 5:38-39)

D. It’s the sin underneath the sin that says, “I know better than God” (= pride)

E. And it doesn’t help that we’re living in a culture that actually celebrates this posture

1. “You’ve got to be true to yourself at all costs. You decide for yourself what’s best for you.”

2. Consider the lyrics to the Disney song “Let it Go”

IV. How do we find our way back to God?

A. We need to practice the fear of the Lord

1. In 3:6, it’s clear that Adam and Eve thought this tree would be the beginning of a new kind of wisdom for them.

2. But in reality the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Pv 1:7)

= You are God and I am not, and you are so much wiser than I am

True wisdom, see reality

= There is a God and I am not Him

3. One very concrete way to practice fear of the Lord is to read the Bible regularly and do our best to submit our hearts to what it says. When we don’t read the Bible, we are in effect saying, “God I’ve already got life figured out; I don’t need your guidance.”

B. In reality, we don’t find our way back to God; God has to find us.

1. The story of Christmas is the story of a God who chases after his rebellious creatures by becoming one of them

2. Philippians 2:6-8

a. We weren’t God and tried to be like him. Jesus was God and instead let go of his divine privileges to become one of us

b. He then went to a tree of death (the cross) so that we could have access once more to the tree of life

3. Seeing the humiliating lengths to which Jesus is willing to go breaks us of that prideful independence and enables us to give our lives to him in dependence and trust.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Genesis 3 is a very familiar passage to many of us. What new idea did you learn from Sunday’s message or how did the message help you appreciate something in a new or deeper way?

2. On Sunday it was argued that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means to claim the right to decide for yourself what is good and what is evil. Was that argument compelling to you? Does that understanding answer the questions this passage raises for you?

3. On Sunday we were called back to a basic biblical posture known as “the fear of the Lord.” How do you see that posture playing out or not playing out in your own life? How would you like to see it play out?

4. We were also encouraged to read Scripture regularly. What does your practice of reading Scripture actually look like? How do you actually go about it, and what are some of the challenges you encounter? Don’t feel a need to give the “right” answer. Just talk honestly with each other about your actual experience.

5. Sunday’s message concluded with a reminder that ultimately God has to find his way to us. What would it look like for you to open yourself more fully to God’s pursuit of you during this Christmas season?