

97-12-14b

Okay, we're back now from our break. And we're looking at what to me at least is a little bit of a puzzle. This has always seemed a little bit mystical to me, like there was something almost magical about the fruit of the tree of life.

And it is as though God has to take physical measures to keep man from living forever. It almost seems to, when you look at it on the surface, it's as though, well, God's kind of worried here. God's afraid that something's going to happen that should not.

And I couldn't figure out, first of all, why is He concerned, and why does He take the action that He takes? Because He says, and in these early chapters of Genesis, any time you have God speaking and have Him directly quoted, it's very, very important. You have Him quoted His actual words when He creates the universe. The question is, who wrote that down? How did we get these words? Obviously, somebody had to tell Adam or somebody in those early days what God said, because He wasn't there.

He didn't see any of these things take place. But some kind of way we found out the verbatim account of what God said and what happened when He said it. Then you have Adam and Eve in the garden, and you see God taking care of him and seeing to his needs.

And He says, these things that I have created are good. He looks at the man and He says, not good that he should be alone. He provides Eve.

And then you have the fall, and you have God speaking again. And the Lord God says in verse 14 through 19, these consequences of the fall, the curses that are placed on the serpent, on the ground. And then, once again, you have Adam naming Eve, naming her again.

He named her when he first saw her. This should be called woman, for she was taken out of man. And then after this climactic episode, you have a new way of life beginning here, not necessarily on a happy note.

But Adam names his wife again and calls her Eve, because she is the mother of all living. But then God speaks again. And this is not the last time that we're going to see God speak.

We're going to see Him speak and have a conversation with Cain here before long. But here He speaks in verse 22 and says, Behold, the man has become like one of us to no good and evil. And that use of the plural reminds us of the parallel in chapter 1 when God says in verse 26, Let us make man in our image according to our likeness.

And here He says, Man has become like one of us to no good and evil. So there's a fundamental difference between God creating man in His image and after His likeness.

You would think, well, that means He's like God.

But here, this likeness is not good for the man. He is like one of us, knowing good and evil. And this experiential knowledge of good and evil causes God to make a change in the environment.

Now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. God has pronounced one of the consequences for the fall back in verses 17 through 19. The ground is cursed.

In toil you shall eat of it. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. You shall eat of the herb of the field.

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread. The idea we get here is that this is the inevitable consequence, the cursing of the ground. And because man is going to live on this cursed ground, it is going to require him to toil and sweat to have sustenance, to sustain his life for its brief span.

For this to take place, man has to leave the garden. What does that tell us about the garden? Apparently, the ground of the garden is not cursed. And this is why man has to leave it.

If the ground of the garden is cursed, and if it requires toil and cultivation to get anything to grow, then God doesn't have to drive man out of the garden. The garden has basically disappeared because it has come under the curse. Instead, man is driven out of the garden to live on the ground that is cursed.

That's the implication. It doesn't come right out and say that, but notice God says if he stays in the garden, he can put out his hand, partake of the tree of life, and live forever. Something about the garden and something about the location of the tree of life is hallowed.

It's sacred, and it doesn't come under the curse. Man has to go out and live on the cursed ground. And if he's going to live on cursed ground, he's got to leave the garden because the garden is sort of like what God says to Moses up on the mountain.

Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. The garden is the dwelling place of God. The garden is the place where God walks in the breeze of the day.

It's the place where God speaks to man face to face, where man enjoys the presence of God in an unqualified way. That is now off limits. And it's symbolized by the refreshment and by the privilege that comes from reaching out and partaking of the tree of life.

So the tree of life is more than just some sort of physical fruit that sustains the physical

body of man. It sums up and symbolizes everything that the garden represents. The tree of life symbolizes the garden of Eden and the presence of God in that garden.

And to partake of the tree is to be in the garden and be in the presence of God. And God says that can't happen anymore because man has the knowledge of good and evil. And he is now going to forever be choosing between those two.

And that's not what takes place in that sense in the garden. Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden to till the ground. Now how do we arrive at this conclusion about the tree of life? Well, let's take a look at what the scriptures say about the tree of life.

This is a phrase that crops up from time to time, a symbol or an expression. You can see it, for example, in Proverbs 3, verse 18. Proverbs 3, verse 18.

If you have spent any time in Proverbs, you'll remember that the first few chapters are a discourse by wisdom. Wisdom is personified and speaks and cries out in the gates and so forth. And Proverbs 3, verse 18 is right in the midst of that.

Wisdom is being described here beginning in verse 13. Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver and her gain than fine gold.

She is more precious than rubies and all things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Now these are all things that speak of blessing and the favor of God and reward from God.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. And happy are all who retain her.

So you get the picture here that this is a way in the spiritual realm of reentering the garden, of once again enjoying the privilege of reaching out and partaking of the tree of life is to gain wisdom. Wisdom is the gateway back into the garden. What is the garden? It's the place where we enjoy fellowship with God.

It's the place where we enjoy communion with God, blessing from God, the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace. Length of days, riches and honor. All of the things that man lost at the fall are regained by us individually through the finding of wisdom and the gaining of understanding.

A few pages over in Proverbs 11, verse 30, we have another reference to the tree of life. Once again, you have a series of contrasts here. If you begin in Proverbs 11, verse 24, there is one who scatters but increases more.

And there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. These seem to be sort of, in a sense, an oxymoron. If you scatter, you ought to be getting less and less,

and yet you wind up with more.

But if you preserve and hold, you end up in poverty. So these are ironies. They are unexpected results.

The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. Verse 26, the people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who dispenses it or sells it. Verse 27, he who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil.

He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage. Verse 29, he who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be the servant to the wise of heart. Now verse 30, the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

Now this is one of those passages the life equals evangelism crowd like to come to, but this is a very unfortunate mistranslation. In fact, both parts of this verse 30 have been mistranslated. Part of it is there's some problems in the Hebrew text, but verse 30 should read, and you can take my word for this sometime, maybe we'll go through the Hebrew exegesis.

The fruit of righteousness is a tree of life, and it says he who wins souls is wise. This should say the wise takes hold of refreshment. The wise takes hold of refreshment.

Now how do we get taking hold of refreshment instead of winning souls? The word to win here translates to the Hebrew word lakash, and lakash is the word that is used of a husband gaining a bride or gaining a wife. It's used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It means to take possession of, to seize, to keep a hold of, to preserve something in your possession.

To possess or take hold of is the root meaning. And souls here is from nefesh. Normally you see nefesh when it's used for soul in the singular, but here it appears to be in the plural.

It has the OT ending on it, which would indicate a plural. And then you have kakam, which is the word for the wise. So the wise takes hold of nefesh in the plural.

Well, nefesh normally means soul. It can mean life. It also can be and often is used for the desires of the heart.

It can be used for that which your soul seeks or that which refreshes the soul. Nefesh, the verb form here with the same consonants, means to, literally it means to take a deep breath, and it came to mean to be refreshed. It's used three or four times in the Old Testament in that sense, in the Psalms and in 2 Samuel.

And so, particularly in poetry and particularly in wisdom literature, sometimes nefesh doesn't mean soul in the literal sense. It means refreshment or that which satisfies the soul. And especially in the plural here, the wise takes possession of souls.

It doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But the wise takes hold of refreshment is consistent and parallel with what you see here in the context. He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, but the fruit, particularly here in verse 30, often in the Psalms and in Proverbs, you will see two parallel statements, the same idea expressed in parallel form.

The fruit of righteousness is a tree of life. Well, righteousness is associated with the wise. The wise are righteous, the foolish are evil, as you see in the preceding context.

So, the tree of life is parallel here with the idea of refreshment, with the idea of genuine life, life that refreshes, life that is full. And so, the fruit of righteousness is a tree of life. And the wise takes hold of or preserves, maintains possession of refreshments, is the idea here.

Another couple of pages over in Proverbs, Proverbs 13, 12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when desire is fulfilled, it is a tree of life. Now, this word deferred, hope deferred, I did a little work on that Hebrew verb.

It's quite interesting. It's a word that is used for having to drag something along, something that lags behind is the idea. Sometimes it's used of sowing seed.

You know, when they would walk the fields to plant seed, you would walk the furrows and trail the seed behind you. You kind of walk ahead and trail the seed behind you. So, this has the idea of something that you're leaving behind, something that is dragging behind you or fading behind you or receding behind you in the distance.

And so, if hope recedes, if hope trails behind and fades away, it makes the heart sick. It's the opposite of life and refreshment. And this is true of us.

We've talked many times about the three great Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. And hope is the motivation. Why do we pursue love? Why do we live the life of faith? It's because of our hope.

When our hope is strong, we have vitality and inner life of the soul. That's what makes us tick as believers. That's what motivates us and moves us forward.

If we let that hope fade and recede, our heart's going to get sick. The motivation to live the life of faith, the motivation to pursue love as a disciple of Christ, wanes along with it. It is essential that we maintain our hope and maintain our expectation.

What is our expectation? That by avoiding evil, by avoiding that pattern of apathy and rebellion that we talked about in the first session, we are going to enjoy God's blessing

and God's favor in this life and in the next. That's a part of our hope. We shouldn't be looking at these passages where people are outside the gates of the city and so forth and say, oh, I'm scared now, I'm afraid, I'm fearful, I'm getting downhearted.

The whole idea is to focus on the positive side. There's no reason to worry about that. We have every ability and every expectation of being a son indeed and of inheriting all the things that God has promised to us.

All we have to do is keep that hope alive and pursue it and live in the light of it. It's an easy thing to do because just like Adam and Eve receiving the provision of God, even in a fallen world and even in a fallen state and even in the light of our failures, God provides and God wants the best for us. Hope deferred, hope that trails and fades away, makes the heart sick.

But desire that is coming, the wish that is being fulfilled, and once again, this is a parallel, in this case, a contrasting parallel. If you let your hope fade away, your heart's going to get sick. But if your expectation, if your desire, if it comes, if you see it being fulfilled, if it's real to you, it's a tree of life.

It's a refreshment. It renews the vitality of soul. So we see that the tree of life is starting to mean something as it's used in Scripture.

It's talking about not just that which sustains physical life, but that which refreshes and fulfills and satisfies in the deep and abiding sense. And keep in the back of your mind the tree of life that we see in the New Jerusalem. What is that going to mean? Does it mean that people outside the city who don't have the right to the tree of life are going to waste away and die somehow or going to be emaciated and groveling and unhappy and living in darkness? Not at all.

Keep that in mind as we go forward. Proverbs 15 and verse 4. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. A wholesome tongue.

Look a few verses up. A soft answer in verse 1. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. We have the knowledge of good and evil. And so now, our access to the tree of life comes about in a different way.

We don't just walk into the garden and pluck the fruit for our refreshment of soul. Because of the new circumstance and the new economy, the new status of things, we approach and take the fruit of the tree of life in a different way. It is through wisdom.

It is through righteousness. It is through the expression of wisdom and righteousness in

the tongue that we take hold of the tree of life and the refreshment and the true life that it represents. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.

But a perverse tongue, perverseness in it, breaks the spirit. Now, our next reference to the tree of life is Revelation 22, which we had as our scripture reading in our first passage this morning. In the middle of the street and on either side of the river in the New Jerusalem is the tree of life, which bears these twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month.

The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. You might also just note in passing, we always speculate and wonder about the nature of things in the eternal future. It's interesting to me that there is no night because the light of the Lamb and the light of the Father shines constantly, and yet you still have months.

Time is still measured in some fashion because the twelve months still occur. And you still have the measurement because that's how you know there's a different fruit every month. Well, month is based on the lunar cycle and divides the year into equal parts and so forth.

And so there is some measure of time, and you get the idea that there is still some heavens and earth and some form of solar system, or in some way, shape, or form, you still have the months being measured. Just thought I'd point that out for your amusement. But the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations, and there is a sense in which there is some healing that still takes place.

And there shall be no more curse. Isn't that interesting? In verse 3, free access to the tree of life, no more curse. The very same juxtaposition of tree of life versus curse, blessing versus cursing, refreshment versus cursing that we have in Genesis chapter 3. They shall see his face.

That's something that no longer takes place when Adam and Eve are outside the garden. They don't see the face of the Lord anymore. They're not qualified.

Because of their knowledge of good and evil, they can't approach the Lord God anymore. So how is it now, if we don't reach out our hand and take from the tree of life and live forever, what is the path to eternal life? And once again, we're mixing the real and the symbolic here, as God does. How does that take place? Take a look at John chapter 6. We've looked at this passage before, but not necessarily in this light.

John chapter 6, beginning at verse 47. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.

One of the figures that Jesus never uses is he never says, I am the tree of life, does he? Or I am the fruit of the tree of life. What does he say? I am the bread of life. It's fascinating to think about, because in our fallen state, we're not qualified to partake of

the fruit of the tree of life.

We partake of bread. And the bread that we eat of, that comes by the toil of the sweat of our brow, perishes with the using. We have to keep on doing that.

And it doesn't give us eternal life. But Jesus says here, I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead.

This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread, verse 51, which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

The bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. Verse 53, most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on me will live because of me.

This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever. And if you read this in the light of Genesis 3, lest he put out his hand and take of the tree of life and live forever, the means of eating and living forever now is different.

It's not fruit, it's bread, and it's the bread of life. It's the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's his life and his death of which we partake, his flesh and his blood.

So it's a fascinating thing. Now, we talk about living forever, and in Hebrew this is the word *olam*, lest he reach out his hand, partake of the tree, and live forever. We think, well, this is eternal life.

Man can just live indefinitely into the eternal realms, past the millennial kingdom into whatever the new heavens and new earth, all he's got to do is keep some of this fruit with him and he'll never die. We have to be a little bit knowledgeable about the word forever as it is used in both the Old Testament and the New. We're going to look this morning at just a few examples from the Old Testament to remind ourselves that this word has to be taken in context.

Look, for example, at Exodus chapter 12 and verse 24. There are hundreds of uses of the word forever in the Bible. We're going to look at most of them just from the book of Exodus to make our point.

Exodus 12.24. God is giving the instructions for the Passover to Moses. In verse 21,

Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. You shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin.

And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians. And when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.

And in Exodus 12.24, And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. Olam. Identical same word that's used back in Genesis 3. Now, how long will Israel observe the Passover? Well, it says forever.

Does that mean that they're going to continue to kill these lambs in the church age? Does it mean that they will continue to do so through the millennial kingdom? Does it mean that they will continue to do so into the eternal kingdom of the Father? Well, we wonder about that because this is living under the law. This is the law of Moses. And it says that this is an ordinance for you and your sons forever.

Well, that at least raises a question in our mind. In Genesis 13.15, God tells Abraham that this is the land that I will give you and you and your descendants will possess this land forever. Well, what about the new heavens and new earth? Does that count? Well, God was talking about the physical land that Abraham is walking up and down in there over in Palestine.

He says forever. Does that mean even after this earth is destroyed and the new heavens and new earth come along? Well, it raises a little question in our mind. You can see in Exodus 3.15, God talks about his own name.

When God and Moses are having the conversation about Moses going and confronting the children of Israel and leading them out of Egypt. Exodus 3.14, God said to Moses, I am who I am. Moses has said, what is your name? What name am I going to tell the Israelites that you go by? I am who I am.

And he said, thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I am has sent me to you. Then in verse 15, moreover God said to Moses, thus you shall say to the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever and this is my memorial to all generations.

Now, you have here one of the first times a parallel. He says this is my name forever and this is my memorial to all generations. And if you start looking at all of the occasions where forever comes up, you start to see that to all generations and forever start to be used more or less synonymously.

There's a subtle idea there because there's going to be a time when we're not going to be having any more generations. There's not going to be marriage in the eternal future. You're not going to continue to have offspring and be producing new generations.

But each new generation that does come up, this is the name of God. So as long as there are generations being produced, this is the name of God that they're going to know. But there's going to come a time when all the generations that are ever going to be are in existence and they all know God by that name.

You can see this in many of the feasts that are instituted for Israel. An example of this is the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 12, 14. Again in verse 17 and again in verse 24.

God says, this is a memorial feast to be celebrated, la'olam, unto forever. And Exodus 12, 14, 12, 17 and 12, 24, three times God says the Feast of Unleavened Bread will be celebrated in Israel forever. Well, we have an idea of how long that lasts.

That's going to last as long as the nation of Israel functioning under the law of Moses exists. But that's not the same as what we sometimes think of as forever, meaning into the distant eternal future and beyond. When the Egyptians are destroyed in Exodus 14, 13, it says that you will see them.

He says, look at them now because you will see them no more again forever. Well, that does sound like never again. But look at Exodus 19, 9. Here's an interesting use of the word.

Exodus 19, 9. Moses was having some troubles, not for the last time, with the people in Israel. God says in Exodus 19, 5, Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, that you shall be a special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.

So Moses came and called for the elders of the people and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken, we will do. Of course, that's not going to happen, but that's what they say.

So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. Look at verse 9. The Lord said to Moses, Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you and believe you forever. La'olam.

La' means to and olam means the ages future. So Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. Moses goes all the way back up the mountain and God says, The reason I'm speaking to you from the thick cloud is so that people will trust you forever.

Well, how long is that forever? Well, it's as long as Moses is alive, certainly. Perhaps you can apply it to the words of Moses in the law. But God's appearance in the cloud speaking to Moses.

This is pretty much the eyewitnesses who see the cloud and see Moses coming and going from the cloud. God says, I'm speaking to you from this cloud so that people will believe you. You will have credibility before them forever.

Meaning that there will never be a time that these people don't have confidence in you. And take a look at Exodus 27-21. Exodus 27-21.

This is the regulations concerning a pierced ear slave. Actually, this is not the pierced ear slave. This is the oil of pressed olives that is brought for light to cause the lamp to burn continually.

In the tabernacle of meeting outside the veil, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel. So the oil that burns in the holy place is supposed to burn forever.

Laolam. And it does not. Now, I have written down, apparently, the wrong reference for the pierced ear slave.

But you remember the idea there that when the slave was freed and he said, well, I don't want to leave. I want to stay here and be a member of your household. They would back the slave up to the doorpost of the house and pierce his ear against the doorpost with an awl.

And he would be a pierced ear slave. And he would be a servant in that house forever, the verse says. So if you look up that passage, use a concordance or something.

I've misrecorded it. But it says that he will be a servant in that household forever. Laolam.

Well, obviously, that's not going to be true in the millennial kingdom and in the eternal kingdom of the Father. This person is still a slave in the household that he lived in on this earth. So we see that the meaning of this word is determined by context.

The meaning of this phrase forever in Hebrew. And so we want to be a little bit cautious because there are times when this phrase is abused. And you will see it particularly when you come to discussions of the new dispensationalism where because the covenants of God in the Old Testament are said to be forever, then they must apply to the people of God.

You see this in many distortions of the word of God. A lot of times it will hinge on this

idea of forever. And we just have to remember that that meaning is determined by context.

Well, what is the context in Genesis 3? Take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. This doesn't mean that this eating of the fruit is going to preserve life into the eternal future. It has the idea of life on this earth.

Most of these examples that we have seen and if you do a concordance study of your own on the term forever, especially if you do it with a strong concordance and do it on olam, the Hebrew word, you will see that forever generally means into the indefinite future in human history or in the history of Israel as a nation even. God says, for example, He tells Saul, I would have perpetuated your dynasty in Israel forever. Well, we've got to take that in context.

It doesn't mean that the family of Saul would have ruled, that Jesus Christ would have come from the line of Saul, and so forth. It just means that perpetually or indefinitely or into the far future is what it can mean from time to time. But the sense that we want to come away with here is that man has been physically removed from the Garden of Eden, from that hallowed ground on which God walks, from that hallowed ground in which the tree of life sinks its roots and bears its fruit.

And this is a metaphor for the refreshment and the fulfillment and the life that is eternal in quality that surrounds the presence of God that we once had access to, Adam and Eve had access to, and now we don't because we are in the flesh. And to leave the Garden and go out and till the ground means that we now have to subsist on bread instead of fruit. We do that in the physical realm, but we also do that in the spiritual realm.

And in the spiritual realm, the bread that satisfies and the bread that grants eternal life in the same way that this fruit did is the bread that came down from heaven. It is the person of Jesus Christ. Abiding in Him like a branch abiding in the vine is the means of reaching out.

Wouldn't it be interesting, wouldn't you love to be able to go back somehow in time and see the Garden of Eden and walk up to the tree of life and actually grab the fruit off the tree and take a big bite? If things go well, we are actually going to have that privilege in the Kingdom of the Father. If we are faithful, if we don't fall away and engage in a lifestyle and pattern of evil one of these days in the far distant future, we will walk through the gates of the New Jerusalem, walk up to the shore of the River of Life, reach up and partake of that fruit. But we don't have to wait.

We don't have to wait a thousand plus years. We can partake of life by partaking of the bread of life, partaking of Jesus Christ. And we know how that happens.

It happens by doing just what we are doing right now. Because Christ is the Word. In the

beginning was the Word.

The Word was with God. The Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we beheld His glory. It's no coincidence that that is the opening sequence of the Gospel of John. Because it is in John that Jesus says, you must partake of my flesh.

You might look again at John chapter 8. This cannibal idea was very difficult and many of Jesus' disciples turned back from following Him once He said these words because they didn't see the meaning of it. They didn't understand the meaning of it. But Jesus... We have a passage in John 8, but I think we need to be in John 4. In John 4 when Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well, and verse 10, if you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, give me a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.

Water of life. Reminds us of John's vision of the future when the river of life sustains that tree. And he goes on down in verse 23, the hour is coming and now is when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

For the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. So, having reviewed that, and then you turn a few pages over to John chapter 6 when Jesus is talking about partaking of His flesh and His blood.

Verse 60, many of His disciples when they heard this said this is a hard saying. Who can understand it? When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing.

The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life. So, all of these things that Jesus has said about having life and living forever had to do with the words and the spirit. The way to partake of Christ's flesh and His blood is to partake of the word and the spirit.

The way to reach out and partake of the tree of life, to drink of the water of life, is to worship Him in spirit and in truth. We cannot overestimate the value of spending time in God's word, not just hearing the teaching of it, but reflecting on it and thinking about it as it relates to our day-to-day circumstances, as it relates to the decisions that we make. There is a lot on the line.

The ability to enjoy and partake of eternal life now in the soul depends on whether or not we partake of the word and of the spirit, whether we eat the bread of life and drink the water of life. There is going to come a time when that will no longer be necessary. Bread as a diet is necessary in the fallen world, in the cursed world outside the garden.

That's where we subsist now and we live by faith in the Son of God. We are sustained by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is coming a time when we will walk back through the east gate of the garden, when we will walk back into the dwelling place of God.

We will walk through... You remember the east gate of Jerusalem is the one that faced the Mount of Olives. The gate of Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, will be the one that we are allowed to enter and walk into the very presence of God. Going through that east gate, you can walk right up the temple steps and walk into the holy place and, if you were the high priest, the Holy of Holies.

We will have that privilege if we are qualified. Partaking of the bread in this life will qualify us to partake of the fruit in the next. Partaking of Christ, abiding in Christ in this life qualifies us for the inheritance, qualifies us to enter the gates of the city.

It is only if we lose sight of that, if we forget about it, if our hope dwindles behind us and fades and we lose heart and lose perspective, we will end up in the next life minus inheritance. It is amazing that we lose sight of this truth. But we do.

Let me just, in closing, direct your attention back to two passages that we have seen before. 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 9. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Why is he saying this? Look at the preceding eight verses. You all are taking each other, you believers are taking each other to court over petty matters.

You yourselves do wrong and cheat and you do these things to your brethren, he says in verse 8. Do you not know, in verse 9, that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Now, is he just going to launch off and say, oh, by the way, unbelievers are not going to go into the kingdom of God. That's not the context. He's saying, pay attention, believers.

If you're unrighteous, you're not going to inherit. If you do these things that I'm talking about in verses 1 through 8, you're not going to inherit. Do not be deceived.

Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. The very same thing John says in Revelation twice. Look at Galatians 5.19. The works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murderers, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.

A more detailed, same kind of list, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. This is in chapter 5 of Galatians, which is a book written to believers who have missed the way of righteousness. They're not operating by faith.

They're operating by the works of the law. Our inheritance is on the line. Our right to the tree of life, to walk in and partake of refreshment, and enjoy the presence of God, is on the line in our daily decisions, our daily eating of the bread, our daily drinking of the water of life, through the word and through the spirit.

There's no way to too strongly emphasize or too strongly underscore the importance of waking up and paying attention to our thought life, our hope, and our faith, and our love, as we live day to day in the confident expectation that these things are real and will take place. It ought to be a powerful motivation. It ought to be a powerful hope that motivates us and encourages us and brings forth in us the fruit of the Spirit as we live from day to day.

Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the promise of the tree of life. We thank you for the righteousness that you grant to us by faith through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray that we will live a life that is pleasing in your sight, that we will.