

Eve's confession "with the help of the Lord."

A second quality to life East of Eden is God still has a future for us. It was East of Eden and yet there were children to be born, work to do and life to live. In fact, we are told in Genesis 5 verse 5 that Adam had many sons and daughters and lived 930 years. Now there is some discussion about the amount of years named in the Old Testament. I have no problem believing that Adam lived 930 years, but I like another thought along with these numbers. The perfect number was 1000. 1000 years is a God like number. Thus human beings are not said to live to be 1000. Methuselah lived 969 years. He was the oldest recorded man and yet he was not as God. He was human, but a full life. Adam lived 930 years. Adam lived a full and long life after the fall. In other words, there is life beyond regret.

God has a future for you and me beyond regret.

Dr. Maya Angelou passed away last week and they held her Memorial Service at Wake Forest, this week. Some of you know her story. She was raped as a young girl and the revenge that was taken upon the man who raped her by her relative left her virtually mute for many years. However, she would die a Poet Lauriat and Professor at Wake Forest University. When interviewed about her faith she once said

Well, I believed that there was a God because I was told it by my grandmother and later by other adults. But when I found that I knew not only that there was God but also that I was a child of God, when I understood that, when I comprehended that, more than that, when I internalized that, ingested that, I became courageous.

She once wrote:

*"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."*

Because of God's love, because of Christ there is nothing we have done, no regret that will rob us from a future with Christ. Adam and Eve would not have the life that God had first intended, but East of Eden they would still have a long and full life. This is the good news of the gospel. Our poor choices cannot ultimately thwart

God's goodness and love. There is still life to be lived, life that is full because it is life in Christ.

Lastly, East of Eden there is grace. The story of Chapter 4 is a story of tragedy and grace. The story is a story of Cain and Abel. If it is not enough that Adam and Eve live with regret, their son Cain will as well. Out of jealousy he takes the life of his own brother and is again banished to the Land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain is punished, but again God protects him and gives him another chance. Yet, the true story of grace is how the chapter ends. Adam and Eve have another son in place of Abel and his name is Seth. Seth is the son of promise. Seth is the son of grace that is to come. Seth is the sign that God's activity continues east of Eden, for when we go to Luke's gospel we discover in Jesus' genealogy this in Luke 3:37 "the son of Seth, the son of Adam and the son of God."

God's grace comes to Adam and Eve east of Eden and in their tragic moment of the death of Abel, God grants to them Seth. He would be the child of the promise. God's grace is sufficient in our place of regret.

Let me take you on one more tour. Here is another room. This room has for its center an old rugged cross. It dwarfs everything else in the room. No matter where you look in this room... the cross is in view. There is no getting away from it. In this room there are picture frames with no pictures because the events are yet to take place. There is one wall with a sign that says "Your Sin." Yet, underneath the sign is a picture frame with nothing but a blank canvas as brilliant white as you have ever seen. What is this room? It is a room called grace. It is the place where sin is forgiven, and regret is released. It is a place that is made possible because of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Like the room called regret, there is a sign over the door, but this is a sign you will read on your way out. In the room called regret the sign over the door read "What Might Have Been." On your way out of the room called grace the sign is different... it simply reads, "What is Yet To Be."

Because of Jesus there is life East of Eden.



## VACATION SPOTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

# East of Eden - Living with Regret

Genesis 3:21-24, 4:25-26



Join me for a walk through a room. Picture, if you will, walking through a door into a room that is filled with pictures. Some of them look familiar and others you have never seen before because your choices kept you from the experience. On the first wall there are pictures of your children. You recognize them when they are so very young, however you don't recognize the moments because you missed them. There they are in a Preschool play or on a trip with your spouse that you could not attend. There are several dance recitals and ball games that happened too early in the afternoon or on a night when work called you away. There are a few pictures of events that you know you were present, but were not really present. Somewhere in your memory you know you were there, but not really there.

Look at this wall... it is filled with pictures of your parents aged and sitting on a porch in a place you rarely go. You have never noticed how old they look. When did they get so old? There are some pictures of friends from childhood, high school, college and former neighbors who you vowed you would see again. But you know, life gets in the way. We are busy and they understand. Then, there is the one picture of the friend that is gone. Gone... how did that happen? O how we have the best of intentions. Another picture is of the family member that you were once so close too but words were said, things were done and forgiveness seems impossible at this point.

On this wall are pictures of places. Places you dreamed of going to, but never went. A view from a top of a mountain you said you were going to climb. There is a picture of a city you always dreamed of going to, but it looks as though that will not happen now since it is too far and too expensive. There is a picture of where you grew up and your grandparent's house where you were always going to take your children to visit. Now they have grown up and

live far away and you wonder if they will ever come back to the home where they grew up.

On the fourth wall are pictures of that car you always wanted to buy, but it was going to be \$10 more a month and that was too much. There is a diploma in the area of study that has always interested you, but there is one thing missing on the diploma. What is missing? Your name. There is the picture of a home where you hoped to live. There is also a picture of a company sign, the company that offered you that job years ago but it was a risk, it was a chance, it was too unsure and you chose the another path.

In the middle of the room is a desk and on that desk is a Bible. It looks new and unopened. Someday you tell yourself. Someday faith will be my priority. Someday I will hide God's word in my heart. I have time for that...some day.

You glance up over the door way and there is sign. The sign simply reads "What Might Have Been." What is this place? What is this room? It is the room we call regret and it is a place where we all arrive at one time or another.

How do we live with regret? Regrets come in different shapes and sizes. Some regrets are the result of daily choices. The truth is... we cannot do everything. We will all die with some regrets, but some of our regrets are the result of being faithful to what life has presented us. There are some hard choices that have to be made if we are going to be faithful to God and to others. Those regrets are outweighed by a life of faithfulness. They are there, but they are not heavy. They might bring a sigh, but nothing more.

However, there are those moments of regret that weigh heavy on our hearts. There are some opportunities in life where we are faced with a choice and the choice we made is not the choice we would make now. We so wish we could go back and have a do-over, but we cannot. So, we live in this room called regret. Sad to say some

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of us live every day and every moment in the rooms we call regret. In fact, our whole life is colored by one or two bad decisions and now, every decision we make are influenced by regret. Is there life after regret?

If there was ever anyone who lived with regret it was that first man and woman the persons the Bible refers to as Adam and Eve. The story of God's creation is an amazing story and the crowning act of the creation story is not the creation of the moon, sun and stars. God's greatest handiwork is not the oceans, rivers and streams. God's greatest creativity is not found in the animal world. God's ultimate act and crowning moment in creation is when God said "let us make man (humanity) in our image." So God created man in His own image. In the image of God, He created Him; male and female... He created them."

God's crowning act was the creation of man and woman in the image of God. If we read the story of creation, we discover that God not only created man and woman but also placed man and woman into a world where they literally had it all. Let's think for a moment about the life that was created for Adam and Eve.

There was provision. Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden and they are told in Genesis 2:15-17 that they have been given everything they need. They are given permission to eat from any of the trees in the garden. Adam and Eve are not deprived. They are completely provided for by God. Think of all of the anxiety that is in our worrying about provision. There is no such anxiety in the Garden of Eden.

They are not only given provision, they are given purpose. Adam is told that he is to work and take care of the Garden of Eden. The term means to till and to care. Everyone needs vocation. Vocation gives us purpose and our lives meaning. In Eden there was purpose. It was more than a job to do. In many ways, Adam and Eve are invited to be co-laborers with God.

They are given companionship. God concludes it is not good for man to be alone and concludes that there was the need for the creation of a suitable one. It is interesting that all the animals are paraded before Adam in the story, but they are not companionship. We need others, so God creates Adam a companion in life. Woman is taken from man but not from behind, above or in front but from his side. Woman is created in God's image as one who is equal and beside man. They stand together before God. Man's reaction is "Wow! Good Job God!" There is companionship.

There is innocence. They are both naked and there is

no shame. They live life in the presence of each other and God without guilt or shame. Can you imagine living before God and before others completely secure in who you are and completely trusting others?

There is something else in the Garden at this point that we sometimes overlook and that is there is discipline or we might call prohibition. Walter Bruggaman, in his commentary on Genesis, says in the Garden of Eden there are Permission, Prohibition and vocation. Interestingly he points out that what we remember the most about the Garden of Eden is the prohibition of not eating from the Tree of Knowledge. However, the prohibition only makes sense in balance.

How it prohibition a good gift? First, we must note that in the Garden of Eden there is a bad tree. We are not told why it is there and we might want a Garden where there are no dangers but just like life, the Garden has it's danger. However, unlike many moments in life, the danger is identified and God in God's love and care for Adam and Eve points it out to them, warns them against it and is completely honest with them about the consequences. There is no trick involved. There is no mystery involved of wondering what it means to please God. God says everything is permissible, but this one thing and it is not permissible because it will destroy you.

God's prohibition is a gift. Adam and Eve are not left on their own with that which is dangerous and destructive. God cares so much that God warns them and seeks to prohibit their own destructive desires.

Yet, we know the story. The serpent tricks the woman with a half-truth. The serpent asks the question of whether God really said, "You should not eat from any tree in the garden?" No, God did not say that. God said you shall eat freely with the exception of that which will destroy you. Yet, the woman eats and the man also takes and eats and in that moment regret comes to call.

Look at the picture of regret. They are banished from the garden. The term there indicates a sending away. We are told that they are placed on the East side of Eden. Interestingly, eastward is the place throughout the Old Testament that signifies away from God. Cain will go eastward from God's presence. Lot goes eastward in his greed. The local of the Tower of Babel was to the east. Abraham dismisses Keturah's sons to the east. This word picture in the Old Testament suggests a movement away from what God intended and also an irreversible movement.

There is work East of Eden, but the work is different. The work is not vocation, but rather toil. The ground was once

fertile and needed care now it is toil. Companionship has faltered. Instead of being together side-by-side they are not facing each other with pointing fingers and accusations. The woman to God "the serpent you created tricked me." The man to God "the woman you created tricked me." It is your fault not mine. Ultimately they blame God for creation of the tree and the serpent. So, there is not only a lack of companionship, but fellowship with God. God concludes that they must be banished from the garden less they eat of the Tree of Life and live forever.

What are we to make of this Tree of Life? It is not the Tree of Knowledge? Could it be that the Tree of Life was to be as eternal life is meant to be a gift from God? The issue is that man and woman have gained wisdom not from God, but from disobedience. They want to take life, gain life, earn life, and be in control. They want the shortcut and to cut out the creator. Sadly they did not understand the very thing they desired could not be taken by force, but rather had to be received as one of God's good gifts of creation.

Then of course there is shame and guilt. Once the sin has occurred they hide from God and they hide themselves with leaves.

There they are... the first man and woman banished from the Garden of Eden to East of Eden living in the room we call regret. They live with a regret that can never be righted by them. They will live with the consequences of their choice their whole life and in fact, so do we.

Is there life East of Eden? Is there hope in the room called regret?

Let's look for a moment at the hope that comes from God, even East of Eden.

First, East of Eden we discover that God has not abandoned them. In fact, God is still providing for them and they learn a new dependence upon God. There is something about regret that teaches us that we are weak and God is strong. There is something about regret that reminds us that we falter and we need God's presence and guidance.

First of all, God provides for Adam and Eve by making

animal skins for their covering. He does not send them out unprotected wearing their sewed fig leaves, but instead God makes them a covering. God provides for them, even East of Eden. The first story East of Eden is the birth of children. Let's read it "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man."

Notice Eve's words "with the help of God." There in her words is the attitude of dependence. We do not find any words like that in the Garden of Eden. There is no sense of the need of God or dependence upon God, until there is sin and consequence. Dependence becomes evident East of Eden.

When we live with what might have been, we become very aware of our need of God. When we live with the regret of the past, we are keenly aware of our failure, our misgivings and our need of God's help. Sad to say, some of us wonder around the room of regret and still refuse to acknowledge our desperate need of God. Yet, for those who will find life beyond regret, it begins with acknowledging a simple confession. I need God.

In Prince Caspian, Aslan the Lion, who is the Christ figure, meets with Lucy. Lucy remarks that Aslan is larger, however Aslan says, "I am not larger. It is only because you are older." He then says, "the more you grow, the bigger I will become." It was C.S. Lewis' way of reminding us that God gets bigger and larger and more important to us as we grow in our understanding of God. There is something about regret that puts us in the place to grow. There we see just how big God really is and how much we must learn to depend on God.

We need God's forgiveness. We need God's guidance. We need God's reassurance. We need God's presence.

Solomon was the man who had it all. He had riches, companionship, education, wisdom and power, yet he would conclude that it was as nothing. He would write in Proverbs 3:5-6, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.*

When we find ourselves lost in the room of regret, we begin by taking our eyes off the past, our self and placing our attention on Jesus.

When we are living with regret, we begin a new life with

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