

### **“Did God Really Say: Do Not Eat the Fruit?”**

Did that really happen? It's a question that doesn't surprise me one bit when I hear it from children. Honestly, I expected I would have heard it more often during our Vacation Bible School this week. We talked about how Jesus walked on water, and how Peter did the same for a time. We talked about not one but two miraculous catches of fish. We talked about how Jesus once spoke to a storm and made it completely calm. And not once this week did the kids say, “Did that really happen?”

Now, they may not have asked it this week, but certainly kids have asked me that question. They watch closely how things work, how the world operates. They expect things to be consistent and predictable. And so they wonder about things like the miracles I just mentioned and they ask, “Did that really happen? Are you just telling us stories?”

Of course, this is not limited to children. Adults often have questions. They also ask, “Is it true? Did it really happen the way that the Bible says it did?” Maybe they are looking for archaeological evidence or scientific explanations. Sometimes these are relatively innocent questions from someone new to reading and hearing the Bible. But unfortunately, sometimes they are accusations against the Bible. Sometimes they are a new way for Satan to whisper into our ears, “Did God really say?”

That's what our Summer Worship Series this year is all about. It is an opportunity to train our ears to hear God's voice rather than the voice of temptation all around us. It is a chance to look at areas where confusion and misunderstanding clearly exist and to ask, “What did God really say?” And it starts for us today near the very beginning, shortly after the creation of the world. Today we peek into the Garden of Eden and ask, “Did God really say, ‘Don't eat the fruit?’”

Let's review quickly. **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** That's the first verse of the entire Bible. The rest of Genesis chapter one goes on to explain how God worked in an orderly fashion over six days to create everything in the universe. At the high point of his creation were two people, a man and a woman, Adam and Eve. God made them in his image and gave them responsibility over the rest of his creation. And included in his instructions to them was this: eat the fruit of any of the trees in the garden except for one. One special tree, called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was off limits. From that tree Adam and Eve were not to eat.

So why would God do that? Why would he put a tree in the garden that was off limits? God had created Adam and Eve with free will. He allowed them to make choices. And in giving them this tree and this command, he gave them the opportunity to worship him. Martin Luther compared this tree in the center of the garden to a church in which Adam and Eve offered their praises. They showed how much they loved God by listening to him and obeying his command. And it wasn't an unreasonable or difficult command. They had a whole garden full of trees whose fruit they could eat.

But you already heard what happened next. Into this perfect garden came a strange figure and with him a strange temptation. A serpent, which from the rest of Scripture we know to be Satan himself, spoke to Eve and uttered those now-famous words: “Did God really say?” Only look closely at what he said, **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”** Of course he didn't say that! God gave them many trees from which to eat. The garden was full of them. That was an easy question. That was a question Eve could handle. But it got Eve thinking. It got her wondering. It got her thinking about that one tree and about God's command: “Don't eat it or you will surely die.”

Then the father of lies continued in his lying work. “You don't believe that, do you? You're not going to die. You're going to know life as you have never known it before! You're going to know good and evil in a way that you've never known them before. You're going to be like God. Just eat the fruit.” Some of Satan's sordid lies were more subtle, some had segments of the truth. All were meant to deceive.

And deceive they did. Eve and Adam believed Satan instead of God. They ignored all of the evidence around them and concluded that even though God had blessed them with everything that they needed

and so much more, he couldn't be trusted. He had withheld from them something worthwhile, something good. And so Eve took a bite and she shared it with Adam. Sin. They had done precisely what God told them not to do.

And look at the aftermath of their sin. They were ashamed, a feeling they had never felt before. They foolishly tried to cover their nakedness with leaves as though that were a real solution. They were confused enough to think that they could hide in the garden from the God who created the garden and everything and everyone in it. And they were selfish. They wanted to save themselves and were willing to sacrifice anyone else if it would get them off the hook. How different the world looked! How different their marriage looked! What a difference sin had made already!

But there was more, because there were consequences: pain and suffering, toil and hard work. The man and the woman would live out a series of painful days until they returned to the dust from which God had formed them.

So, is it real? Did this really happen? I sincerely hope that you have learned and have believed that it is real and that it did happen. But not everyone does. There are many voices that scream loudly that this whole story is just that, a story. It is a myth or a legend or a fable, depending on your take. Someone made it up to explain something, and so it is interesting, but not really true. But hold firmly to this truth: this is a real account of what really took place. God shared it with us, and he did so with purpose. This account explains so much of what we see around us. It explains so much about us. It answers so many big questions, questions like, "Why do bad things happen?" and "Why do they happen to good people like me?"

And many of those questions are answered by the teaching of original sin. See, even though Adam and Eve were made in the image of God, they lost that perfect image when they fell into Satan's trap and sinned. Their children and their children's children, all the way down to us today, have been conceived and born in sin. We even confessed that this morning at the beginning of the service when we said, "Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth." That means that even before we do anything that anyone could point to as a sin, we are sinners. We are guilty before God. We inherited sin from our sinful parents. Adam and Eve's fall into sin is a real thing that affects us still today.

Another thing we notice when looking back on the first sin is how things are so similar today. Through changing times and cultures and places, Satan still strives to snare us with insidious temptations, sometimes subtle, sometimes more obvious. And time after time we prove how selfish we can be. Sin has turned our hearts inward instead of out to love our neighbor.

But there's one more thing we haven't mentioned, and this is the most important part of the account of the fall. This is the promise, God's promise. At the time that foolish, sinful, confused Adam and Eve were completely helpless, God offered them mercy. As he scolded the serpent he promised, **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."** He promised to undo the effects of the fall. He promised to crush the tempter and his power. And he did.

Why is it so important to realize that Genesis 3:1-19 is a real event? Because it tells us why we need a Savior and it tells us that we have that Savior. On the cross Jesus crushed the head of the serpent, freeing us from his hold on our lives. By rising from the dead he shouted out to us that our sins were forgiven and that death has been turned to life. We're not going to pick and choose what parts of the Bible are real and what parts are fantasy. We don't need to do that because we know it is true as God gave it to us. We're going to celebrate that God has given us forgiveness, life and salvation, the things we so deeply needed.

Did this really happen? Yes it did. This is God's grace in action for us. And no matter how old you are, it is worth reading and learning and studying and praying about. God really said "Don't eat the fruit." Adam and Eve really disobeyed. And God really sent a Savior to set right everything they and we have done wrong.

The Text: Genesis 3:1–19 (NIV84)

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?’”

<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> 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.’ ”

<sup>4</sup> “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

<sup>10</sup> He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

<sup>11</sup> And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

<sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

<sup>14</sup> So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”