

Praise to Thee, Thou Great Creator

John Fawcett (1740–1817)

Praise to thee, thou great Creator;
Praise be thine from every tongue;
Join, my soul, with every creature,
Join the universal song.

Father, source of all compassion,
Free, unbounded grace is thine:
Hail the God of our salvation:
Praise him for his love divine.

For ten thousand blessings given,
For the hope of future joy,
Sound his praise through earth and heaven,
Sound Jehovah's praise on high.

Joyfully on earth adore him,
Till in heaven our song we raise;
There, enraptured, fall before him,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Tried with Fire: The Way Things Used To Be

Kevin T. Bauder

Human suffering is universal. We all feel pain. We ought to expect it, but usually we don't. When suffering intrudes, we default to self-pity. Rather than saying, "It's my turn," we ask, "Why me?"

Perhaps we ought to remember why people suffer at all. We should recall that God did not hardwire our affliction into the original creation. The early chapters of Genesis include two accounts of creation, the second of which retells a part of the story from the first. In the first narrative (Gen 1:1-2:4) God creates the entire world in six days, resting on the seventh. As He creates, he repeatedly pronounces His creation to be *good* (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The seventh time He pronounces it *very good* (Gen 1:31). This sevenfold declaration underlines the goodness of creation in its completeness and perfection.

In this context, the word *good* (Hebrew *tov*) has the idea of *useful* or *beneficial*. The goodness of the created world consisted in its utility. Of course, God did not need to tell time by sun, moon, and stars (Gen 1:14-19). God did not need to eat fruit, seeds, and leafy green vegetables (Gen 1:29-30). Who did need these things? The answer is that humans, the apex of God's creation, did. God made a world in which humans could thrive.

Furthermore, God placed His blessing upon the human race (Gen 1:28). Under God's blessing humans were meant to be fruitful, to multiply and fill the earth, to subdue it (a strong term, as its use in Esther 7:8 shows) and to rule over God's creation in the world. Just as God had ordered creation previously, humans made in God's image were to continue bringing order to the created world.

In this good creation, under God's blessing, the human relationship to God was fundamentally one of trust. Humans did not decide what was good. God did. That is the theme upon which the second creation account expands (Gen. 2:5-24). God created the man and placed him in a garden—a place of shelter and beauty. God furnished the garden with plants and fruit trees. The man was given permission to eat of the fruit of any tree except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and bad (Gen 2:16-17).



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Undoubtedly this was a real tree, with leaves, bark, and fruit that could be touched and tasted. It was not a magic tree that would somehow poison the soul. It was, however, a symbolic tree, as its name indicates. It stands for knowing good and bad. Up to this point in the story, only God had said what was good. The man simply received what God knew to be good. For Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree would represent his decision to “know” or determine good and bad for himself. That would be a rejection of the creator’s evaluation of the good in favor of Adam’s own understanding.

In other words, for Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad would, in effect, be to declare his independence of God. This act was the worst thing imaginable. It would certainly entail a rejection of God’s good gifts. Worse, it would involve a fundamental distrust of either the Creator’s ability to discern or willingness to provide the good. As an act of distrust, it would indict the very character of God.

God announced that the penalty for transgression was death. The phrase “you shall surely die” does not mean that Adam would die the instant he ate. Rather, it is a Hebrew idiom indicating that Adam would immediately come under sentence of death. How could it be otherwise? God is the source of life. To declare independence of God is to declare independence of life. Death is the only possible result.

The critical question posed by the tree, and by Adam’s probation, is quite simple: Is the Creator trustworthy? Can He be trusted to know and provide what is good? In answer to this question, God for the first time announced that something is *not* good. Specifically, it was not good for the man to be alone (Gen 2:18). Consequently, God determined to provide the good. First, however, he had to make Adam aware of the deficiency.

God taught Adam this lesson by making some animals and inviting Adam to engage in an exercise of comparative taxonomy (Gen 2:19). As Adam classified the animals he had to compare and contrast them; in the process he must inevitably insert himself into those comparisons and contrasts. As a result, Adam became aware of his own alone-ness. He could find no helper “like him” (Gen 2:20).

At this point God placed the man in a deep sleep, removed a rib, and fashioned it into a woman (Gen 2:21-22). Interestingly, God did not breathe into her the breath of life. Evidently she received her life, not directly from God, but through the man. Humanity is not merely a collection of similar individuals; it is one race enlivened by one life principle. Each individual human being is born as an instance of the same unifying life principle that God first breathed into Adam.

Adam should have understood that the Creator was trustworthy. When God brought the woman to him, his response was to utter the first poem that any human ever composed (Gen 2:23):

This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh:
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.

These words recognize the excellence of the Creator’s gift. Knowing that something was not good, God made Adam aware of the deficiency. Then God supplied the good in a way and to a degree that Adam could never have imagined. Adam should have known that the Creator could be trusted.

That is the truth that helps to understand how serious the events of Genesis 3 actually were. In the fall, Adam did more than to eat a piece of fruit (though he certainly did that). At a deeper level, he attacked the trustworthy character of the Creator and came under the promised condemnation. The significance of that condemnation, however, will require further explanation.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
