

One command! Adam and Eve had one command! Our first parents couldn't keep ... one command! They did the one thing God specifically told them not to do – they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Once they did, the whole thing fell apart ... they lost their paradise, they found their sinful naked selves and experienced pain, sadness and eventually death. As devastating as that was, what would have made this an eternal tragedy? Eating from the Tree of Life, the other tree mentioned by name in the Garden of Eden. Eating from that tree would not have undone what they did, it would have trapped them forever in their sinful hopeless condition.

To protect them from themselves, God has to usher them out of the Garden and then stationed an armed angel guard by the Tree of Life. While Adam and Eve weren't allowed to eat from the Tree of Life, our Revelation lesson today gives us this breaking news alert:

**“Now We Can Eat from the Tree of Life.”**

That comforts the faithful: ***We don't receive what we deserve,*** while warns the unrepentant: ***This message is not to be changed.***

As Jesus brings to a close the Apostle John's vision, he speaks about bringing our present world to a close: **“Look, I am coming soon and my reward is with me, to repay each one according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. ”**

Alpha and Omega – on the front panel of our baptismal font – are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus identifies himself as the eternal and changeless God who'll return, as promised and reward each person according to what they have done.

I know what you're thinking. *“Yes, we are saved by faith, not by works!”* No, Jesus isn't contradicting that, he's simply pointing out, like he does in other passages of Scripture, that ***since faith without works is dead,*** our good works demonstrate the faith living inside us.

Jesus leaves no doubt about that: **“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and so that they may enter through the gates into the city.”** We're going to be judged, but it isn't based on what we did or didn't do, it's going to be based on whether we're wearing the spotless clothes Jesus gave us to wear. It's what Jesus did for us that allows us walk through the pearly gates and eat from the Tree of Life.

We have such a loving and forgiving God, don't we? Everyone receives this ultimate blessing, right? No. It's not because God doesn't want it to happen. It's because people deny there's anything wrong with them. Jesus gives a “Most Wanted” list of those who won't be dining at the Tree of Life: **“Outside are the dogs, that is, the sorcerers, the adulterers, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”**

The Jews called everyone not one of them, a Gentile or a “dog,” because they were excluded from God's chosen people then. Those who repeatedly oppose God's will and ways are excluded from God's chosen people, his believers, now.

- The **sorcerers** ... try to control things present and future by themselves, without God.
- The **adulterers** ... are sexually active before marriage, or unfaithful while married.
- The **murderers** have anger and hatred in their hearts.
- The **idolaters** refuse to give God the top spot in their heart.
- Liars love listening to **falsehoods** and then spreading lies.

It's embarrassing that you and I constantly show up on this list. It's terrifying to hear that the mighty Lord is going to return with his angels and give us what we deserve. He's coming to pay us our wages, what we have earned. Separation from God forever in hell.

If that's what has happened to our loved ones who died from our St. Paul's family, then today is not a

celebration. If that's what we can expect, then we might as well shut this down, go home and try to find as much happiness and fun now because what's coming is too horrible and dreadful to even think about.

But we are not Adam and Eve. Jesus lets us know **"Now We Can Eat from the Tree of Life."** We don't receive what we deserve because: **"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star."**

After encouraging congregations, like ours, to receive Revelation as his testimony, as God's Word, Jesus identifies himself by three unusual names:

- As the **Root of David**, Jesus is David's Creator. He's true God.
- As the **Offspring of David**, Jesus is also David's descendant. He's true man.

As true man, Jesus is our substitute. As true God, Jesus is our perfect substitute. He's exactly what we need our Savior to be!

- As the **bright Morning Star**, Jesus promises a new heaven and a new earth, just like the sun announces a new day.

The new heaven and earth is the place those who rely on Jesus as Savior will live with him in glory forever. That's what our loved ones who died trusting in him are experiencing right now.

John's continues to write: **The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears this say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who wants the water of life take it as a gift.**

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit. The bride is the bride of Christ, or believers. Both extend the invitation to **"Come"** to those who do not yet believe in Jesus. And then, those who hear this invitation with ears of faith will extend the invitation to **"Come."** No one is excluded because the gospel of Jesus excludes no one. Anyone can drink from the water of life and eat from the Tree of Life. It's free! There's no charge! Jesus already paid for it.

We can extend the invitation to **"Come."** Our Thanksgiving services on November 23, 24, and our Christmas services on December 24, 25 are a perfect time to invite.

God's gracious invitation has a warning attached: **If anyone adds anything to the words of the scroll, or takes words away from this scroll ... you won't be able to eat from the Tree of Life.**

Sadly, it's not unusual even for Christian churches to change God's message. They add or subtract because they claim the Bible contradicts itself.

Let me give you an example of a contradiction.

- True or False: *God loves all people.* True. John 3:16 - **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.**
- True or False: *God hates all who do wrong.* True again. Psalm 5:5 - **You hate all who do wrong.**

God loves all. God hates all. That's a contradiction, isn't it? How do we handle it? You've heard it handled this way: *"God hates the sin, but he loves the sinner."* That's not what the Bible says. God hates the sinner and God loves the sinner is what the Bible teaches. How do we solve that apparent contradiction? At the cross!

While God's hatred for sinners made him punish his own Son, God's love for sinners made him damn his own Son instead of us. The cross solves the apparent contradiction of God's love and God's hatred for sinners.

That's a message that brought sweet comfort to the saints, those faithful believers who died trusting in Jesus. Because now, they're triumphant residents of a heavenly mansion. **Now they can eat from the Tree of Life.** And one day we will too.