

Genesis 2-3 select verses
When God Was Not Enough

How Much Land Does a Man Require? That is the question asked by the title of an 1886 short story by Russian author Leo Tolstoy (whom you probably know for his much more famous work, *War and Peace*).

How Much Land Does a Man Require follows a Russian peasant named Pahom (PAY-om) who, after overhearing his wife and sister-in-law arguing over the merits of impoverished city living vs. peasant farm life, thinks to himself, ‘if only I had an abundance of land, I wouldn’t have to worry about anything, not even the devil himself.’ And so the story begins with the seed planted that if only he had more his life would get better.

As fortune (or misfortune) would have it, a short while later an elderly landowner from their village decides to sell all her land. Along with other peasants, Pahom snatches up a plot and begins working the extra land. Things start going better. He’s able to pay of his debt. Life becomes more comfortable.

But the close proximity with his neighbors leads to disputes and he grows discontent. So he rents a larger plot where he can grow more crops. Soon he amasses a small fortune. But he doesn’t like that he’s not the owner.

Finally he’s introduced to the the Bashkirs (Baash-KEERS) and is told that they’re simple-minded people who own a huge amount of land. Pahom goes to them to buy as much of their land for as low a price as he can negotiate. Their offer is very unusual: for a flat sum of one thousand rubles, Pahom can walk around as large an area as he wants, starting at daybreak, marking his route with a spade along the way. If he returns to his starting point by sunset that day, all the land his route encloses will be his, but if he does not reach his starting point, he will lose his money and receive no land.

He is delighted. He believes he’s chanced upon the bargain of a lifetime. He decides he’s going to make use of every minute of daylight so he starts at the crack of dawn. And you can probably guess what happened. He kept marking out more and more land until just before the sun set. But in his greed he soon realizes he is still very far from the starting point. He’s tried for too much. So he runs back as fast as he can. He runs as long and as hard as he can. Running and running, until just as the sun sets he arrives back at his starting point. The Bashkirs cheer his good fortune.

But exhausted from the run, Pahom drops dead. His servant rather unceremoniously buries him in an ordinary grave about six feet long, thus answering the question posed in the title of the story (how much land does a man require? ...about 6 feet). In his lust for more and more land, Pahom forfeited everything.

There’s a reason, I think, another famous author, James Joyce, called this short story “the greatest story that the world of literature knows”. ...Because it’s a story that speaks so poignantly to human experience. ...Because it encapsulates how it’s always

been since sin entered the world...human beings never content, always wanting more, until they've forfeited everything.

Isn't that ultimately what it at the very heart and center of the fall into sin itself? Isn't that what is right at the center of what caused the need for the season of Lent? When his perfect creation decided that God himself was not enough to satisfy and so they forfeited everything.

Let's reexamine that familiar account this morning so that we might learn its lessons anew and so that we might marvel at God's gracious response.

Now what makes the first instance of this recurring tragedy of the human condition so regrettable is what we're told BEFORE Adam and Eve rejected God. Our first lesson from Genesis sets the scene by going back a chapter before the fall to highlight just how unbelievable and how tragic it really was.

Nowadays, the words 'privilege' gets thrown around a lot in social and political discourse. It's supposed to represent the advantage a person has by birth or race or inheritance. You want to talk about 'privilege'? Adam and Eve had it in spades. Look again at those verses from Genesis 2. Look again at the amazing blessings and advantages Adam and Eve were given. **God formed the man.** He was hand-crafted by God himself. With an amazing biology, brain, and body. No finer sculptor or sculpture could be found. Adam was then given **the breath of life.** ...the animating spirit of life that flows from God...that allows all life to exist without collapsing into nothingness. He was given a perfect home...**a garden in Eden** ...where there was not only abundance (**Out of the ground the LORD God made every kind of tree grow**) but there was pleasure for the all the sense to enjoy (**trees that are pleasant to look at and good for food**). God gave man meaning in life, a job of ruling over his creation and working the ground. Blessing upon blessing.

But that wasn't all. God even gave the man and the woman an amazing opportunity. **The LORD God gave a command to the man. He said, "You may freely eat from every tree in the garden,¹⁷ but you shall not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die."** Now at first blush that may seem out of harmony with the rest. A test? A threat? No. Contrary to what so many mockers of God accuse him of, this was not setting them up to fail. Do you remember how they were created? In the image of God. That means they had perfect desires... perfect hearts and minds... They had every ability to live in that perfection God had given them. This wasn't a test or a threat. This was an opportunity. This was their place to worship...their place to show love to their loving God...to act out what was in their hearts and their minds as they willingly and joyfully obeyed. Luther called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil the first church. They had EVERY privilege...every reason to live contently and joyfully with God in eternal perfection.

But as Luther also said, where God sets us a church, Satan sets up a chapel right next door. We don't know when or exactly how Satan fell. We only know that he did.

Unable to unseat God from his throne, he went after God's treasured possession. And just like we talked about on Wednesday, he did so with lies and deception.

What did Satan lie about first? He implied God was being stingy. Compare Satan's first words to God's back in 2:16. God said, Eat everything, except. God highlighted that they could have anything they wanted except this one tree which served a different purpose. Now look at Satan's question to Eve. Satan said, Did God say you can't eat everything? What kind of God would do that? Why would God withhold? And with one little lie, Satan was able to plant the seeds of doubt that God wasn't giving them everything they could have. He's holding back. There's more out there!

And the second lie built off the first. God lied because he doesn't want what's best for you. He knows you can have more...you can be like him...and he doesn't want you to have it.

And suddenly, with all the privilege and all the blessing, God wasn't enough. They wanted more. **The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, AND that the tree was desirable to make one wise.** There they could finally have what God had not given them. God was not enough.

This tragic mindset is one of the most dangerous to faith. Just think about how deeply Satan has imbedded this lie into the thinking of the world. Just listen the next time you hear and unbeliever talk about a Christian's relationship to God. Listen for how they characterize it in terms of what it causes one to miss out on? You can't do this or that, etc.

Friends, how successful is Satan at still convincing us of that lie?

- God took special care to recreate us with faith in our hearts. God's own handiwork. And yet how often is a life lived by faith not enough. When we demand answer's God hasn't given or demand evidence for what God has not revealed, we're buying into the lie that God is not enough.
- God has blessed us with more material abundance in our place and time than any other. And yet how often do we come to him with grumbling that we don't have enough. How often do we close our fists ever tighter when he asks for our firstfruits? Again, symptomatic of buying into the lie.
- God has given us pleasures for our eyes and ears and mouths to enjoy. Yet how often do we tell him that's not enough? We want pleasure in ways he has deemed unhealthy and therefore unholy. Again, we buy into the lie.
- God has given us meaning in life...to live in love for him and others. He has given us opportunity after opportunity to show our love to him in worship, public and private. How often have we concluded that's just not worth our time? It's not as important as X, Y, or Z?

And if we continue to buy the lie, how much longer before we forfeit everything?

Well, the thing about lies which come in the form of empty promises is that sooner or later they're revealed for what they are. Adam and Eve realized immediately that they

had chased an empty promise and that in their pursuit for more than God, they had forfeited everything. **The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists.** Gone was their innocence...replaced by shame. Gone was their comfort level with one another and with standing before God. Now they had to hide their bodies and their very selves. Everything had been forfeited.

Now, I wish I could tell you that Tolstoy was the kind of author who could turn a tragic story like *How Much Land Does a Man Require* into a happy ending or at least give it a positive moral. But 19 century Russian novelists who spent their lives in poverty and war, didn't tend to think that way. Thankfully Tolstoy was in charge of the narrative in the Garden of Eden.

Our God, the author of life, could have hit reset. He could have ended the experiment right there and gone back to his eternal, Triune existence. But he opted for redemption instead of destruction. As man slapped God in the face, discontent with everything God had given, God responded with grace and a promise to restore what man had forfeited.

You know, when Satan met Jesus in the wilderness in the Gospel for today, he tried to get Jesus with the same lie...God's not enough. Jesus, your Father's provision is not enough. Make yourself some bread. Jesus, your Father's love has not been sufficiently demonstrated. Throw yourself off the temple and let him prove he loves you. Jesus, the lot in life your Father has given you is not enough. Give up the struggle and take the easy path to limitless pleasure in this life. But Jesus saw through it all. He understood there is nothing more than the life with God. And so with each defense, where Adam failed and brought death to all, Jesus succeeded and brought righteousness to all.

Friends, this season of Lent we remember that Jesus came to undo what we forfeited. His life and the perfect righteousness that comes with it is a gift that is yours by faith. His death paid for every single sinful buy in we've made to Satan's lie. And the result is a verdict of not guilty.

Let us remember this day what Jesus came to restore and let us learn the lesson of the fall into sin. Satan's lie that God is not enough only ends in a realization that nothing else satisfies...there is nothing better. So let us see in Christ the life restored...the full life God intends, full of his blessing and his joy, everything else a mere deception. God Is Enough. Jesus gives us eyes to see and hearts to believe. Amen.