

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Trinity 7 – July 14, 2024**  
**Mark 8:1-9 – Knowing Good and Evil**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

We were created to know God, to look to him for all good, to enjoy his goodness forever.

When God created Adam and Eve, when he placed them in the garden of Eden, he provided every good thing. Surely they knew goodness beyond anything we find in our fallen world. We see evil daily, we saw it yesterday, but Adam and Eve could only comprehend evil theoretically. They enjoyed God's perfect creation, his light and his creatures and vegetation. Even the goodness of each other, perfectly complementary, worker and helper, lover and beloved, male and female, man and wife.

Everything was good. Even the gold in the land of Havilah, blessed by the waters of the Pishon flowing out of Eden, even the gold was particularly good.

And there in the garden, God provided abundant food for them to eat. Out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

The tree of life was also there in the midst of the garden. A wonderful gift. For Adam and Eve were created for eternal life, never to die, but to live in the presence of their Maker and commune with him and grow in love and knowledge of him forever.

And along with the tree of life, God also gave the gift of obedience. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a way to serve and thank their Maker by obeying his command. God said to the man, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

By this one rule, God gave them a means to worship and honor him. For obeying God is true worship. From the very beginning, God gave us his good law, so we might have a way to worship him and honor him by not breaking it.

These were all the good things the Lord gave for Adam and Eve. Every good thing in the garden, to eat, enjoy, and care for. Every good thing in each other, companionship and marriage. Every good thing in a relationship with him, and life eternal. Even a means to thank and praise the Giver, to serve and obey, worship and honor him, by following his rules.

Everything was good. Even the prohibited tree was not evil, but good. By giving them this tree, and commanding them not to eat it, God was teaching them to know good and evil. For learning good and turning away from evil comes by obeying God. By trusting him, that he provides everything good and nothing evil, that what he calls evil is evil, and what he calls good is good.

God gives us his law for this reason, that we might learn good and evil. The Ten Commandments teach us the abundant goodness of his love, and protect us from all evil. Each commandment provides a good gift from God to enjoy, along with a way to protect that gift. Marriage, parents, authorities, reputation, honor, possessions, and especially our God and his name and his word, all these good gifts are given and protected for us by the Ten Commands.

The same is true of God's command to Adam and Eve: You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That one simple rule includes the essence of all the Ten Commandments. God was teaching them, "Trust me, that good knowledge and wisdom will come from believing that my rule is good, that I have given you enough. Knowing good and evil is knowing me in my goodness, and hating everything that comes apart from me."

So you see that knowing good and evil is not obtaining some secret, higher knowledge. No, it's faith. Refusing to assume anything evil about God. Learning that everything he gives and says is good, that he would never withhold any blessing from us. Knowing good and evil is trusting that his word is true, his commands are blessings. It's putting ourselves in a proper relationship to our Maker, loving and obeying him, and looking to him for all good.

But when Eve was deceived, when she saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes, when she decided to obtain the knowledge of good and evil by taking of the fruit and eating and giving to her husband, they never obtained what they sought, what the tree was intended to give. So they lost what they would have

learned by obeying God and not eating. They lost the knowledge of true goodness, they came to know corruption and eternal death.

Rather than receiving and enjoying God's gifts, they reached out and took for themselves. They made themselves their own gods. They sought the knowledge of good and evil not in God and his word, but in themselves. Claiming to be wise, as if they knew better than God, they found folly. They sought something better than what they already had; they found shame and death. They sought freedom from God's law, but became slaves to impurity and lawlessness.

Doesn't this describe us all? We daily turn away from God's providential care. We think we are wise, that we know good and evil. But we're only wise in our own eyes, slaves to evil, slaves to impurity and lawlessness. So we cut ourselves off from knowing God. Our wages of sin is death. Trying to get wisdom and goodness on our own, we learn only shame and death.

Oh that God would give us true wisdom from above! Oh that we would humble ourselves and let the Creator teach us to know him, to love and trust him, to hate everything that does not come from his gracious hand. Then we would taste and see that the Lord is good. Then we would stop reaching out and grasping for ourselves, getting only hollowness and hunger and death. Then we would know our God once more, his goodness and compassion.

But thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ! In his love, our Giver never stopped giving. Though we turned away, God never turned from us. He gave us one more good and perfect gift, the highest good. He gave himself, to feed us with even better food than the fruit of the garden, with the knowledge of himself. The Father gave his only-begotten Son, to redeem us and teach us his goodness and mercy once more.

See him now, God made man. Jesus stands with the hungry crowd, lost and fallen humanity. He knows our sin and suffering and death. He's filled with compassion. He's come to save us, to feed us. To bring us back to the good garden and its fruit. He sees us starving for knowledge of his goodness, he sees us cut off from eating the tree of life. But he has compassion. In his love, he feeds us. Jesus works a mighty miracle. Four thousand men, besides women and children, from seven loaves and a few small fish. He takes the bread and gives thanks, and having blessed it, he gives it to the disciples, who distribute it to the people.

Jesus feeds the crowd in the pattern of the Lord's Supper. The exact same way that he fed us on the night he was betrayed. Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body." And his disciples distributed it to the world, the true body and blood of God, given and shed for your forgiveness, to restore you in communion with him.

By this miracle, we begin to know our God. This man who feeds the world is our Creator, the living Word by whom the heavens were made, the bread of life come to bring knowledge of the Father. He teaches us never to seek goodness for ourselves, but to trust him for everything we need. He will provide himself, his own true body as the bread of life, his own blood for the forgiveness of all rebellion. He takes our death upon himself and give us his eternal life.

So learn from Jesus the true knowledge of good and evil. Take and eat from the fruit of his cross, the new tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eat its fruit, in holy communion, and learn how the cross reveals your good God, who knows you. He knows your evil, but he is good, he has compassion. He loves what he has made. He will suffer all evil for you. He will humble himself and die on the cross, to exchange your evil for his glory, your death for his life.

So learn good and evil from the crucified Lord, who died for you on Good Friday, hidden under a death that seems evil to our eyes. See him giving himself on a tree of death, the cross, to make it your tree of life. He gladly suffered every evil on your behalf, that you might enjoy his goodness forever. And as assurance of that promise, he's given you to eat of the fruit of the new tree of life, the fruit of the cross, his own body and blood, given and shed for you, for the life of the world.

So take, and eat. Enjoy the free gift of God, the fruit of sanctification, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Know God and his gifts and his goodness. Take and eat of the new tree of life and the new tree of the knowledge of true goodness, the fruit of the cross in his Supper. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.