Jesus At the Testing Tree

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[0:00] Tonight's story begins in a garden, a beautiful garden. Streams running through it, trees heavy with fruit, gentle animals grazing in the grass.

! And all the grassy meadows and our first main character enters the scene.
It's Adam. He's made of the earth. He's put into the garden by the hand of God. He has a beautiful wife, flawless in every way, at his side.
And in the cool of the evening, he walked with his creator in the garden. Father and son, husband and wife. And in this garden are two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
But this man is under law. He's in a covenant of works with his God. And it is a gentle covenant.
[1:06] You may eat of all of the trees of the garden, but this one tree, this tree only, just one, you may not eat.

You can eat all of the trees except for this one. And you see, this tree is a testing tree to test Adam's love and obedience.
And yes, the tree is good. The tree is beautiful and it produces wonderful fruit that would be good to eat. And there's knowledge in this tree. There's wisdom in eating it.
But God says, no, at least not now, not yet. Obey me now in this. Show me your love. Show me your faithfulness.
Show me your devotion in this one thing. Refrain from this tree. Refrain from this tree.
[2:03] And just as there was a promise of death if Adam disobeyed, there was also a promise of life if Adam obeyed.

Because the test was not just for him. It was for all of us. It was all that was represented in Adam, who he was standing as their head, as their representative.
You can read about this in several places. 1 Corinthians 15. The first man, Adam, became a living being. The last Adam, a life-giving spirit.
Or Romans 5 and 6. Talking about Adam, he was a pattern of the one to come. So there was this first Adam. Adam, he's representing all of humanity.
And there's going to be a second Adam. And just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous.
[3:03] And so there we were. We're represented by Adam in this story. And in Adam, we were under law. And we are under law in Adam.

And so it's obey and live, disobey and die. And it all comes down to what happens at this tree. And the tree is the test.
And I just want to bring this even into greater clarity. What would have happened if Adam would have obeyed? We're so used to thinking of Adam disobeying.
I want you to think of the option. What would have happened if Adam would have obeyed? Where would we be now? Well, we wouldn't be here. We wouldn't be remembering our Lord Jesus.
It seems clear that at some point the test would be over for Adam. And all of mankind in Adam would be counted righteous with Adam.
[4:01] As Adam is their representative, that would be all of us. And all of us would be sealed in that righteousness. So there would have never been a fall. The kingdom of God would have spread through the whole earth.

That little garden would have filled the entire earth. The glory of God, the knowledge of the glory of God would cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. And there would be no death.

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There would be no sickness. There would be no pain or darkness or fear or guilt or shame. For through the obedience of the one man, the many would be made righteous.
But that's what we would have gained. That's what we lost. And it came down to this testing tree. This testing tree in a beautiful garden. Eat all the fruit of the garden. Eat to your heart's content. Enjoy it.
[5:07] But refrain from this one tree. Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Walk with your wife. Enjoy the wife of your youth. Receive all of these things.

Say thank you. But for me, do not eat from this tree. So ends the first scene.
And you know what happens next. The ancient serpent shows up in the garden. He comes to the garden.
The accuser. The murderer from the beginning. The liar. The dragon enemy of God. And he slithers into the garden.
And he slithers up to Eve and Adam. While they are looking at this tree. And he speaks twisted words into our parents' ears. And our mother hears.
[6:04] And she takes some of that fruit. And she, with the devil beside her, gives some to Adam. And Adam ate. And instead of righteousness.

It was just nakedness. Instead of being clothed. And confident before God. Now it's nakedness. And instead of wisdom. Adam finds bitterness and shame.
And the darkness comes to that garden. And Adam fell from his joyful place. He fell from his happy place. And he took you and me with him.
Down into this darkness. Down he came. Down into this veil of tears. Down into the devil's kingdom. Down into this place of death. And he becomes a rebel.
He becomes twisted with lies. And he becomes twisted with fear. And he throws his lot in with the evil one. And it happens all at this testing tree.
[7:09] Everything we gained. We could have gained. We lost. And everything we had. We lost. Milton.

The Puritan poet. In his great poem Paradise Lost. Gives us a picture. It's just a picture. Of what happened next. In heaven.
And this is what happens. After this scene. The devil shows up. Adam falls. And in heaven. The father speaks. And this is what God.
The father says. But yet. All is not done. Man disobeying. Disloyal. Breaks his fealty.
And sins. Against the high supremacy. Of heaven. He with his whole posterity. Must die. Die he. Or justice. Must die.
[8:10] Unless for him. Some other able and willing pay. The rigid satisfaction. Death. For death. Say.

Heavenly powers. Speaking to the angels. Where shall we find such love? Which of you. Will be mortal. To redeem man's mortal sins.
And just. The unjust. To save. He asked. But all the heavenly choir. Stood mute. And silence. Was in heaven. On man's behalf.
Patron. Or intercessor. None appeared. And now. Without redemption. All mankind. Would have been lost. A judge.
To death. And hell. By doom. Severe. Had not the son of God. In whom the fullness. Dwells of love divine. His dearest. Mediation.
[9:10] Thus. Renewed. Father. Thy word is past. Man shall find grace. Grace. Behold me then. Me.

For him. Life. For life. I offer. On me. Let your anger. Fall. And so. With this in mind. God comes down to man.
And he has words. He has words with Adam. And he has words with Eve. And he has words with that serpent. He says. One of this woman's sons. Will crush your head. And then God did something that had never been seen before.
Had never happened before. He killed some of those animals right in front of Adam and Eve. Can you imagine the shock? And he takes their fig leaves off of them.
And dresses them in bloody skins. Death. And he chased them out of Eden. And he blocked the way from the tree of life.

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[10:20] And the reason is. So they couldn't come back. This way was blocked. They weren't to hope. Of ever getting back. In this way.

They were never to hope to have eternal life. By eating of that tree. And so. He puts their hope in something else. He says. The only hope you have is my promise. And then they begin to wait.
And wait. And they're waiting for another man. Another Adam. Another tree. Another testing tree.
And when the time had fully come. God sent his son. Born of a woman. Born under law. To redeem those.
Under law. You see now. Here's the second Adam. The second Adam is born. And he's born just like Adam. He's born under law.
[11:19] And for him. It is obey and live. And disobey and die. For him. It's not just. His life. Now he's representing. All of his people. All those he represents.

His obedience. Will stand for their obedience. And their death. Will become his death. And so he goes to a garden. 33 years.
After he is born. He arrives at a garden. The garden of Gethsemane. And there is this battle fought. This battle for. Will he submit. Will he obey.
It's a battle of obedience. It's a battle of faith. But. The test. The final test. Had not yet quite arrived. He had his own testing tree.
To go to. And this man's. Testing tree. Was not in a beautiful garden. There are some things. That are the same. And there are some things. That are drastically different.
[12:17] This man's. Tree. Was not with a beautiful wife. Beside his side. Fruit trees. His testing tree. Bush. Bush. Bush.

Bush. Bush Bush. was not eat from all the others, but not this one. His testing tree was not refrain from this tree. It was go to the tree.
Climb the tree. Die on the tree. And the place was not Eden. That's not where he fought his battle. That's not where his faith and love and obedience were put to the test.
All four Gospels tells us the name of that place. That's an interesting fact. Because there's not a lot of things that show up in every single one of the Gospels, but this is one of them.
They give the name of the place where he died. Golgotha. The skull. We call it Calvary.
[13:21] You know why we do that? It comes from the Latin word Calva. For skull. So every time we say that, we're saying the skull. And so this isn't Eden, the place of life.

This is a place of death. Some think it was a hill outside of Jerusalem that was pitted and indented and looked like a skull. And so you could see it as you looked out of Jerusalem.
And that's probably why there was crucifixions there. It was a very open place that you could see. And so here's the skull eerily looking out over the city with crosses on it.
And so this isn't Eden. It's the skull. And there he went to face his test. And so the questions are the same.
Will you do this for me? Will you love me? Will you obey me? Will you drink this cup that I give you? This is his test of obedience. This is his test of faith.
[14:30] Will I be your God still? Will you trust and obey and love me here? Now in the desert temptations when he started his ministry he sort of retraced all of Israel's time in the desert.

He took their disobedience and he replaced it with his obedience as it were. So all their grumbling he replaced with prayer.
And all their lack of faith he replaced with man does not live by bread alone. They grumbled and he held on to God's word. But now at the skull he isn't just retracing Israel's steps.
He's going all the way back to the beginning. He's going all the way back to that first man where the fall began. He's retaking Adam's test.
But it is so much more and it's so much worse than what Adam faced. Because not only is this a test of obedience it's death.
[15:37] It's a sacrifice. It's punishment. It's obedience and punishment put together in one moment. And so he's nailed to history.

And he goes willingly to it. He's hung on it. Will he trust God now? Will he cling to God now?
Or will he call on twelve legions of angels to rescue him? We know that that thought at least crossed his mind as a possibility because he said in one of his trials do you think I cannot call on my father and he will at once not put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels.

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And so will you obey me now? Will you obey me now? Not when it's just the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Romans against him. Now when it's not just man striking him.
Now stricken by God. Smitten by him and afflicted. Pierced for our transgressions. Crushed for our iniquity. Not when he's led like a lamb to the slaughter.
[16:55] And who is leading him to that slaughter? It's his own father. And now he's being cut off from the land of the living. And now it's the Lord's will, the Lord's pleasure to crush him and cause him to suffer.

Will he trust now? Will he obey now? Not when it's man against him but now when God himself has turned his hand against him.
And in those three hours of darkness his father crushes him. And his father causes him to suffer. And this is the test. Will he endure it? And in the enduring of it will he stay faithful? Will he go on loving?
Will he go on holding on to God? What will he do? Will he submit himself still? What will he do? And this is where I just want you, if you're a child of God, hear this.
[18:10] If you're a saint, hear this. I want you to hear your Savior's faith. hear your Savior's obedience. Hear him passing the test.

And he cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? What is that? I'll tell you, it's a cry of great misery and sadness, but underneath it, that is faith and obedience.
That is faith calling out. That is trust. That is, I love you, Father. I'm holding on to you. This is him passing the test. So God has gone from him.
Every bit of joy that he had known in his life is now filled with misery and there's nothing left of God's light. There's nothing left of God's smile that he can see. All his darkness, all his misery, all the poverty, all the desperation of hell is filling his soul.
And will he obey now when he can't see anything? And this is what he's crying out, My God, my God.
[19:28] Well, what was he thinking about in that moment of absolute misery? Well, those words are taken from Psalm 22.1. In his misery, in the darkness of that moment, he is thinking about the word of God and he is believing it and he is holding on to it and he's saying, this is mine.

He's claiming it. This is God's word for me. Now, he had just seen the soldiers dividing his clothes up amongst themselves by lot. And he must have thought, that's what they said, that's what David said in Psalm 22.18.
And the leader said, right after that, he trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue him. That's almost a direct quote from Psalm 22.8. And he heard it all and in his misery, he turned to the word of God and he found help there.
He found words to say to his God there. He found something to hold on to there. So Satan is storming his soul and God is so far gone.
No man was ever so wretched. And yet he's holding on to God's word. So Adam disregarded God's word in the perfect location.
[20:50] Adam disregarded God's word in Eden and Jesus, our Savior, clung to it on Golgotha. And so at Adam's testing tree, what God said, Adam just disregarded. He forgot.

It didn't matter. It didn't weigh enough. It was nothing to him. But now at Jesus' testing tree, what God said, he believed. What was in God's word, he held on to.
And that's his faith. So at Jesus' testing tree, what God said, he believed. And that was him passing the test. So who is God? Is he my enemy? Is he one I have to escape?
Is he the one who's a liar who's keeping me from life? Is he one I have to break away from? No. Jesus is saying, my God, he's mine still.
I'm his still. In the words of Job, though you slay me, I will trust him. Though you crush me, I'm yours and you're mine.
[21:52] And so, my God, he bends the knee. He humbles himself. And he says, not my will, but your will be done. I'll drink the cup.

Because you're my God. My God hears me when I call. And so I will call. When all my life is turned to death, you're still my God.
God. So those are his final words of misery, but in them are all the faith and the obedience that I need.

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Because here, this is his one act of righteousness. His whole life was an act of righteousness, but now here's the fulfillment and the culmination of it. This one act of righteousness that makes many righteous, in the words of Romans 5.
So here's the gospel. Here's the answer to all my failures. All my miserable failures. Because see, you know, I have been put to the test.
[23:03] And you have been put to the test. And we have come to those moments of testing. And what did we do? And what have we done? Well, we've doubted.

We disbelieved. We disregarded God's word. Didn't we? God has put us through deep waters. But they were nowhere as deep. Nowhere as miserable as Christ's waters.
But instead of trusting, I've said in my heart, God, you don't love me. I can't trust you. What are you doing? It feels like you've abandoned me.
And I've acted like that. I'm sure you have too. But here is my righteousness.
Here is the answer to all my miserable failure. My Jesus passed that test. He passed the test. He obeyed.
[24:08] He trusted. He loved. He held on to the very end. And he died in anguish, trusting and obeying his God's word.

And that's the gospel. It's not your obedience. It's not your faith. It's his. And this is the righteousness that has been imputed to me.
And if you're a Christian, this is the righteousness that has been imputed, given to you. And so look away from yourself. Look away from yourself. And so maybe you're struggling in misery and you're wrestling with faith.
It's like every day is Jacob wrestling with the Lord and sometimes you're failing and you're letting go and it's all too much. And you're fearing and you're doubting. And this is what I want to say.
Look at this. Look at Jesus. Look at what he did. And maybe you're saying, well, look at me and I'm a mess.
[25:09] How can he love me? And the answer is just simply quit looking at you. Quit looking at you. Look at your Savior. He passed the test.

He passed the test for us. And so his obedience is more than enough and God asks no more. And so dear weak saint, dear hurting saint, look at your Savior tonight.
Marvel at his love. His love for God. not just his love for you, but his love for his God. And know that that love and that obedience is counted to you.
And so you're robed in that righteousness. So turn from your failures and turn to him. what we want to say with the hymn writer.
And with this, I'll close. This is what we want to say. Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night, Jesus, I come. Jesus, I come.
[26:29] Out of my shameful failure and loss, Jesus, I come. Jesus, I come to you. I come to you.

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