

Words of Encouragement: Digging Deeper

Our Bible opens with the dramatic events of creation, including the early interaction between God and humanity. Early in the narrative we read this solemn warning from God regarding the tree of knowledge: "...in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen 2:17) We next learn of the tragic fall into sin by eating of that very tree. Then follows another 47 chapters and 65 books of holy writ detailing God's involvement in human history.

What happened here? Adam and Eve died, sure enough, but it took a lot longer than a day. Ask any grade school student what happened here and the likely conclusion is that either God didn't know what he was talking about or things didn't work out like he had said. Sadly, many adults are content to abandon the matter with similar conclusions, often adding some retort like 'the Bible is full of contradictions.'

Here's the truth: Adam and Eve *did* die on the day that they ate of that tree, spiritually. In their flesh they lived on to see that spiritual death worked out in the lives of their children as one brother murdered another within one generation. This was the first physical human death. Adam and Eve knew exactly the death God was talking about long before they met their own physical demise. What seems contradictory actually points to deeper meaning.

The example may seem rather silly, but is there a principle at work here? Why would God put something like this in his Word?

Make no mistake; God is not trying to trick us. He's not the classic bait-and-switch con artist that sucks us in only to change the rules half way through. No, he is the pure one, the holy one, and in him there is not even the faintest shadow of turning. His promise is quite simple: Seek and you shall find. (Matt 7:7-8)

There lies the answer to the quandary. Although they are sometimes easy to overlook, the Bible is full of details like this example that should cause us to draw aside and consider. Why did God say that? This wasn't what I expected. Why did he allow this? Doesn't Isaiah say something like that too? These are not questions of doubt, but of inquiring faith. These are the questions of a seeker. Often at the end of questions like these, we find God.

We may not often think of it this way, but there is a certain playful quality about God. He loves a good treasure hunt. He loves the discovery. He loves being sought out. And he loves revealing himself to those who diligently seek him. (Heb 11:6)

One time Jesus' disciples asked him why he spoke in parables: This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand." In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." (Matt 13:13-14)

By choosing his words carefully, Jesus knew that some people, the seekers would draw aside to consider what he was saying, while other people would look past his wisdom as if there was nothing there. As Proverbs 14:6 says, "A scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge is easy to one who has understanding." Evidently God thinks there is more to hearing than sound waves on the eardrums and more to seeing than light waves in the eyes. The pressing matter is spiritual perception—seeing and hearing in the heart, the spirit of a person. Leave it to Jesus to press the issue.

Just before Jesus' answer above he told his disciples, "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you." (v. 11) Does God tell secrets? Perhaps the best way to say it is that while there's nothing 'secretive' about what God shows his people, he does reveal hidden things to those who seek him. In Colossians Paul refers to the mystery that has been revealed, "which is Christ in us, the hope of glory." (1:27) God isn't keeping this a secret, but it is a mystery that requires revelation. Later Paul speaks of Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." It's pretty clear where to look, but not everyone searches to find those treasures.

When we encounter something interesting, challenging, or even perplexing in God's word, is it possible that those could be God's signposts to hidden treasure? Moses was baffled by the burning bush and drew aside. God met with him there. May we also draw aside, seek God, and let him reveal treasures to us.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. (Matt 13:44)