

# Shine Through God-Centeredness

## *“Thus” vs. Us*

July 24, 2016

**PRELUDE – Jesus**

**Worship Songs – Jesus / Good, Good  
Father**

**Announcements – Video**

**Feature – King of Anything**

**Drama – The Gardeners**

“Now that we’re in control of our lives ...  
what next?”

Of course we know the answer to that question – at least, we know what the Bible says *happened next*. According to Genesis chapter 3:

- Adam and Eve are cast out of the

Garden – separated from the daily, visible presence of God, which is part of what God meant when He said “on the day you eat of this you will die.” “Death,” biblically speaking, not only means the end of physical existence, it also means separation.

- Adam’s work – to take the good creation God had made and transform it into something even greater – becomes difficult and challenging because the ground now produces thorns and weeds.
- For Eve, bearing children becomes painful. Because Adam followed her lead in eating the fruit, she continues to try and control him. But he resists and powers up in an effort to rule over

her. The harmony they previously experienced is marred by conflict.

- Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. But eventually Cain becomes so jealous of Abel that he murders him in cold blood.
- And in the generations that follow, strife and rebellion and all kinds of evil grow unabated, eventually reaching a point where, the scripture says, God begins to have second thoughts about His decision to create humans.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, whenever this story comes up, there is always the question as to whether or not the writer intended for it to be taken literally or whether it's allegorical. In my studies of the issue over the years, I've

concluded that there are good arguments on both sides of the question. More importantly, I've concluded that whether it's intended to be literal or allegorical, *the point is the same.*

God warned human beings (whether that's a literal Adam and a literal Eve or whether they are symbols intended to represent all of us) ... God warned us – and continues to warn us, if we will listen – that if we eat of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the effects will be felt everywhere. Everything will be messed up in some way. Everything will fall short of the glorious intention for which God designed it ...

... which is why we see the story of Adam and Eve and their descendants playing out again and again in front of our very eyes –

in our homes, in our cities, in our country and all over the world.

- Strife and rebellion and all kinds of evil continue to have a field day.
- Brother continues to rise up against brother with jealousy and murderous intentions.
- Wives still try to control and manipulate their husbands. Husbands still try to power up over them (and vice versa).
- The curse God placed on creation continues to make life difficult – earthquakes and storms and drought and pestilence and disease are constant challenges.
- And then there is the greatest enemy of all, death – and not just physical death which separates us from family

and friends; but also, spiritual death which means that every human being is born into this world separated from God, which is the default condition of the human race.<sup>ii</sup>

And the cause of all of it – if the Bible is to be believed; the thing that produces such disastrous consequences is the act of disobeying God’s command *not to eat* the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

## **The Human Condition**

Now, if you’re familiar with this story – and my hunch is that most of us are – have you ever wondered what the big deal was about that particular tree (even if it’s only intended to be allegorical)?

Personally, I've always been fascinated by it so, as I was preparing for this message I did a little more study. The key to understanding its significance lies in what the serpent says to Eve after she resists his initial temptation.

“God says we’ll certainly die if we eat of its’ fruit!” she says to the serpent.

**And he responds:**

*“You will not certainly die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:4-5 (NIV)*

Now, here’s why that’s important.

The Bible says that every time after God created something, He pronounced it “good.” So, all that Adam and Eve had ever experienced to that point in their lives was only ... *good. They had no knowledge of evil whatsoever.* Even the word itself meant nothing to them. It wasn’t a functional category in their thinking.

The only person in that Garden scene who really knew all about evil – and specifically, the destruction and pain that it causes – was God. For He had been subjected to the evil rebellion of the angels led by the serpent (who was Satan personified). And He knew that evil produces not only destruction and pain but death and separation, because that’s what had happened between Him and the rebellious angels.



And out of His great kindness and love, God's intention for Adam and Eve (and by extension or symbolism, the entire human race) was that they – we – would never know that; that they – we – would never experience *anything* of evil; not even the *slightest knowledge* of what it was. *That* knowledge would be reserved, mercifully, for Himself ... which, as Creator and King of Everything, was his right.

Of course, Satan *knew* that was what God was doing, which is why he said to Eve – and, quite truthfully, I should add, “Once you eat of that, you’ll be like Him,” he said, “because you’ll know what He knows” – *as if* that was a good thing.

But it wasn't.

For the very act of eating was in itself an act of disobedience and rebellion and therefore evil. And because of that, Adam and Eve gained *firsthand* through experience the knowledge of evil that had been reserved for God alone. But not only did they gain knowledge of what evil was; they also began to feel the weight of its consequences in every area of life – a burden that you and I continue to carry to this day.

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Now, at this point, a skeptic might say, “Wait a minute. All of *that* just for eating a piece of fruit? All of *that* just because they wanted to know something that God didn’t want them to know? Seems pretty extreme if you ask me.”

And if that's all this is about – eating fruit or gaining knowledge that God didn't want to share, I agree. It does seem a bit over the top. But that's *not* what this is all about.

### **Here's what it's about:**

*“God knows,” the serpent said,  
“that when you eat [that fruit]  
your eyes will be opened, and  
you will be like [Him] ....”*

*Genesis 3:4-5 (NIV)*

“God is holding out on you,” Satan was saying, “because He knows that you can become just like *Him* – gods – if you so choose. And *that*, I'm here to tell you – as a favor and as a friend – is what this whole tree and fruit thing is all about.”

And that *is* what it's all about. It's about

them – and us, because we continue to follow in their footsteps – it’s about humanity individually and collectively saying to God in big ways and in small, “You’re not the King of Anything that concerns me. I can be ruler over my own life. I can do whatever I want. I don’t need You telling me anything.”

To put it in terms of the metaphor we’ve been using in this current series ...

**<diagram> The default perspective of every human being is ME – not God – at the center of the Universe.**

God gets pushed completely out of the picture. “Everything that is” – which is all the stuff in the circle – “exists for me and my benefit. I am the god (so to speak) of my own little universe.”

And when that happens, bad things are sure to follow as happened to Adam and Eve because that is not the position that you and I or any other human being is intended to have.

In the first week of this series we saw a very vivid description of how bad it can get both in the real-life example of the ambush and assassination of police officers in Dallas ...

**<diagram> ... and also, in what the Apostle Paul once wrote:**

*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature ...*

In other words, when you put YOU at the center of everything; when YOU become

king of everything ...

*... the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.*

When God is not in His rightful position, Paul says, things get really messed up. And we're seeing that more and more in our culture.

But he goes on to say that's not how it *has* to be. It *could be* very different.

**Paul says “when we are at the center it’s really bad, but when *God* is at the center of everything ...”**

*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*  
*Galatians 5:19-23 (NLT)*

And that is exactly the kind of life that everyone in this world *wants* but few people *have*.

## **A Better Way**

It's also the kind of life that our politicians are saying we desperately *need* (especially after terrible events like those we've seen in recent months) but are unable to deliver because their focus is on changing "the system" or "the establishment" and *that won't fix the real problem* – which is *us*,

human beings, and our default perspective that each of us is the center of our own little universe instead of God.

If you've gotten nothing else out of this mega-series of series we're in, I hope you've gotten that!

I spent many hours this past week watching the Republican Convention (and I plan to do the same this week with the Democratic Convention) and I was again reminded that this is the fatal flaw in thinking that characterizes all of our political posturing and proclamations these days, whether liberal or conservative. No matter how loudly and sincerely a candidate might say it, *America simply cannot be great without individual Americans becoming great* because the greatness of any organization



(including a nation) always comes down to the greatness of the individuals who comprise it.

That's why, just once, I want to hear a candidate for a high-level office say to us as citizens "you need to be a better and more virtuous person in every area of your life because our fate as a nation depends on *that* as much as anything I might be able to do for you."

Of course, they won't. Instead, they'll keep focusing on all the stuff that divides us which not only keeps them in power but also means – and, again, this is the point of this mega-series of series – it means that *real and lasting change will have to come from somewhere else*. And we know where that somewhere else is, don't we?

It will have to come from those of us who are Christians; from those of us who are followers of Jesus, who told us “You are the light in this world! So, go and shine! That way, others who don’t know God and who still live by the default worldview with themselves at the center will see your excellent life and its fruit and be drawn to Him.”

And in this mega-series we’ve been talking about what that excellent life looks like; five light-shining-in-the-darkness winsome characteristics that really stand out in our culture in a good way.

- We started with a series on *generosity* – the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of personal

financial assets to the people and causes God loves. Very few people live like that in this world, so it stands out.

- Then we moved to *graciousness* – the unconditional predisposition to treat “them” (those who are not like me and might even be my enemies) better than they deserve because that’s how God in Christ has treated me. Very few people live like that either, so it stands out in a positive way.

And now, we’re talking about God-centeredness ...

**... which we’ve defined as the humble, accountable, obedient, dependent submission to the Primary Being in the Universe (i.e. God).**

And I refer to God in that way – as Primary Being in the Universe – to intentionally draw the contrast with the default human perspective which, as we’ve seen, tends to think of *ourselves* as Primary Being in the Universe.

And this is important to spell out because a lot of us hear the Gospel and come to believe that God is the Three-in-One Father, Son and Spirit who created the world, entered the world, died to save the world, rose to redeem the world and will one day restore the world by destroying sin and death. We repent – we change our minds from the default perspective that pushes God outside of the circle and, instead, we invite Him into our lives.

And that’s a good thing. It’s what produces

salvation. It's what brings us to life spiritually. It ends the separation between us and God caused by sin.

Unfortunately, however, the way we think about it and even talk about it – “accepting Christ into my life” – also tends to leave us with a somewhat distorted picture of reality.

**<diagram> Specifically, we think of  
“coming to faith in Jesus” as  
somehow adding God to our circle ...**

... which, as you can see, is still a very self-centered way of looking at things.

But what happens for a lot of us is, thankfully, is that, at some point, we hear some good preaching that challenges us to put God at the *center* of our lives. So we try

to do that.

**<diagram> And in our minds reality now looks like this ... which is a step in the right direction but it's still not accurate.**

As I said last week, the problem with this view is that it's still all about you. Yes, God is at the center of the picture but it's still *your* picture. It's *your* family, your job, your finances, your concerns, and your life. Even though God is in the middle, you are still the Primary Being.

**<diagram> A better picture – a more accurate picture – is this one ...**

... because, as the Apostle Paul once put it:

*“In Him we live and move and have our being.” Acts 17:28  
(NIV)*

It's not in *us* that God lives and moves and has *His* being. It's actually the other way around because the God who is Father, Son and Spirit is THE PRIMARY, ESSENTIAL BEING IN THE UNIVERSE. Everything and everyone else (including you and me) is secondary and non-essential.

And the transition to a God-centered life is not when you move God to the center of your world. It's when you realize that God is *already* at the center of everything and you start aligning your life to that reality.

And our definition helps us understand what that alignment looks like.

God-centeredness is a *humble submission* to God where we continually confess ...

- It's all about Thee and not about Me.
- It's hallowed be *Thy* name and not *my* name.
- It's *Thy* Kingdom come, not *my* kingdom come.
- It's *Thy* will be done, not *my* will be done.

We talked about that in the first week of this series.

God-centeredness is also an *accountable submission* to God where we confess (continually):

- It's all *Thine* not *mine*.
- Everything that I possess: my money, possessions and time; my career, education and skills; my children; my



body and my mind; my words, relationships and influence; even my life experiences – everything that I, in some way or another, possess belongs ultimately to You, God, because you're the one who gave it to me or made it possible for me.”

And therefore (and this is where the accountability comes in) “I am just a temporary manager who has been privileged to leverage what I have – what God has given me – for God’s Kingdom and God’s glory. I am a steward who will one day be called to account for what I have done with God’s resources.”

And we talked about that in last week’s message which, if you were not here or watching on our livestream, is available on

our app and our website as is the case with all of our messages.

So, we've talked about the first two characteristics of our definition: God-centeredness is the humble and accountable submission to the Primary Being in the Universe.

## **Obedient Submission**

Now, let's talk about the third characteristic, which is *obedient submission*.

And to understand what this is and what it looks like we have to go back to the very beginning of this message and, actually, to the very beginning of the Bible to what happened in the Garden.

Remember, the only rule Adam and Eve is “don’t eat from that one tree. You can have anything and everything else, but stay away from that one.” And they did, until the serpent came to Eve.

**And here’s how he started the conversation:**

*“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”*      *Genesis 3:1*  
*(NIV)*

“Did. God. Say.”

“Well, here’s what *I* say: hogwash. Nothing bad will happen. Eve, you should do this because you deserve it. God is holding out on you.”

So, Eve goes to Adam. “Adam, the serpent

and I have been talking and we say, ‘hogwash. Nothing bad will happen. You and I should do this because we deserve it. God is holding out on us.’”

See, from the very beginning there was a contest about whose voice would be trusted; whose voice would be obeyed. It was “Thus saith the Lord” (to use the old King James language) vs. “Us saith.” It was Thus vs. Us.

And we know what Eve and Adam chose. Because they saw themselves as little gods “Us saith” trumped “Thus saith.”

**So, obviously for a God-centered person, it will be the exact opposite. “Thus saith (the Lord)” trumps “us saith.”**

There's a great example of what this looks like in real life in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

*One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

*When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."*

*Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and*

*haven't caught anything."*

Can you hear the resistance in his voice?

He doesn't say it but you can almost hear him thinking "and, Jesus, don't forget that this is what *we* do for a living and not what *you* do. We've studied these waters for years and years and we know what works and when. And we know what does not work. And what you're saying ... well, it kinda falls into that category."

**BUT ...**

*"... because you say so, I will let  
down the nets." Luke 5:5  
(NIV)*

"Because you say so, I will."

Why would Simon Peter say that? Because

he thought of Jesus as Master, as the Primary Being at the very center of everything in the Universe.

See, when a person is living a God-centered life, “thus saith the Lord” matters more than whatever “us saith” even when “us” thinks we is pretty smart. Because God says so, we will.

**I think that’s what Jesus was getting at one day when he asked a pointed question to his disciples.**

*“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*

*Luke 6:46 (NIV)*

Now, some of you are probably thinking, “Whoa, you’re going to get you’re theology messed up here, Rick. I’m going to stop you before you go off the deep end because

remember, the way we're saved is not about what we do, it's about what Jesus has done."

Yeah, that's true, but Jesus says, "Why would you not do what I say? You think I'm 'all that' but you won't do what I say."

Jesus said...

*"As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like."*

*Luke 6:47 (NIV)*

In other words, Jesus is saying, "here's what it's like for the people who care about 'thus saith the Lord.'"

**This is the fruit of hearing and obeying what God says.**



*“They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.”* Luke 6:48 (NIV)

“Now, let me paint the other picture,” Jesus says. “Here’s what it’s like for those who care about ‘us saith’ – what we think.”

### **Here’s the fruit of disobedience.**

*“But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”*  
Luke 6:49 (NIV)

What's the lesson here? I think it's pretty clear. Jesus doesn't want you to obey his teaching to earn your salvation. Jesus wants you to choose "Thus Saith" because He doesn't want your life to come crashing down.

If you follow your way, the way of the world and the culture, if you keep choosing "us saith" instead of "thus saith" that's what's going to happen. Your life is going to crash.

The reason so many of us are having so much trouble is that we're not doing what Jesus says.

## **Conclusion**

God-centeredness is humble, accountable and obedient submission to the Primary Being of the Universe. Therefore I have a challenge for you, a project for you to try this week.

**Read Matthew 5, 6 & 7 and try to *do* what you read.**

One chapter a day will take you at most 10 minutes each time you read. Read it, make some notes if you need to, write down something that Jesus says to think or believe or do or not do and then put it into practice for the rest of the week.

Now, you will probably fail. Don't flip out. That's why Jesus gave his life to pay for your sin! So, remember that and rejoice.

But pick yourself up and start over because

this is the key not only to you living a great life but also to being able to shine so that others can see your good works and be drawn to the God who loves you – and them – so much.

Let's pray together.

<PRAYER>

**Feature – If You Want Me To**

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Before we leave this morning, I have a couple of things to update you on.

1. Fireworks result

**<video>**

2. Reminder ... service times  
**permanently** changes 8/7 to 9:30 and  
11:00.

3. Offering @Door ... but I want to show  
you something first ...Teacher Supply  
Giveaway explanation ... Facebook  
conversation

## **NHCC FB page**

Here's what I want you to see:

- What you give allows us to have this facility to host this event.
- What you donate allows us to have stuff to give away.
- It allows us to collectively SHINE and to bring glory to God and maybe even

bring a couple of teachers to Him.  
What you give does that. So thank you!

#### 4. Prayer w/Kitti

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 6:4

<sup>ii</sup> Ephesians 2