

There's an old proverb: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." It probably comes from the idea of hunting pheasants or turkey or really any kind of game. If you've got an animal right in front of you, close enough that you can reach out and grab it, then take the shot and count yourself lucky. Don't wait to see if something better appears.

Yes, you may have been able to have two birds instead of one. But you don't know that for certain. And certainty is valuable. Having something in your hand, instead of waiting around for more, is valuable.

The proverb is probably older than you even realize. It's been around, with slight variations here and there, since the 6th c. B.C, when it was written in a book of middle eastern proverbs. Over 2,500 years ago. And probably even longer than that before it was written down. People have been expressing this idea for literally thousands of years.

Until today, when basically our entire financial system is based on this principle. Sure I'll give you a car loan for \$10,000. But you're going to have to pay it back with interest. Because \$10,000 now is worth \$20,000 5 years from now. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

And so it kind of represents one of those basic human impulses. Human beings will always grab hold of those things that are right in front of them, that are certain. And it's considered foolishness to wait for those things that are uncertain.

We see this playing out all the way back in the Garden of Eden. Here we have Adam and Eve living in literal paradise. There is no sin. There is no suffering. There is no death. They have everything they could ever want.

Well... almost everything. Because the devil comes to them and tempts them with something they didn't even know that they wanted until that moment: to be like God. To know good and evil.

You see, Adam and Eve were perfect, but they were still creatures. Still limited. An object can be perfect and still be small. Still be limited in what it can and can't do. A potter can make a pot and it can be an absolutely flawless pot. But it's still just a pot. And it can only do the things that a pot can do.

Well, Adam and Eve were perfect human beings. But they were still just human beings. And they could only do the things that human beings can do. The devil convinces them that being just a human being isn't good enough. That in order to be truly perfect, they need to be like God. They need to be able to do the things God can do.

So he lies to them. He tells them that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil will give them this power. And he tells them that God was lying to them when he said that eating from it would kill them.

Which leaves Adam and Eve with a dilemma. They have the fruit of this tree sitting right and front of them. And they have the threat of death that God has made, but it's a little further off. The tree is certain. It's right here and it looks so pleasing to the eye and so good for food. God's wrath is uncertain. It might happen. It might not. Why worry about it?

And so they believe the devil's lie over the Word of God. They take what they think is the bird in the hand. The temptation that is right in front of them. But then they discover that what they've taken isn't real. It's all a lie. The creature cannot become the creator, any more than the pot can become a potter.

No, in reality, they thought they were taking the bird in the hand, but they were really letting it go. Because they already had paradise. They were already as good as they could be. The world was already as good as it could be. They didn't need to know good and evil, because they already knew good. And knowing evil only stole that goodness away.

And so God punished them. Punished them with suffering in their work and suffering in their childbearing and suffering in all of creation. Ending in their death.

But he also gave them a promise. A promise that the serpent would not go unpunished. And that the evil they had brought into themselves and their children and into the whole world would eventually be undone. For one of Eve's offspring – one of her many descendants – would bruise the serpent's head even as he bruised the offspring's heel. The serpent would be crushed and destroyed, even as the Savior would suffer to make it happen.

And so, having heard this promise, humanity rejected the devil's lies and trusted God's promises completely, forever and ever, the end. Right? Not exactly.

No, in fact, we've repeated Adam and Eve's same sin over and over again. Because day after day we're confronted with that same choice that they had: Do I embrace the sin that is in front of me, and the temporary, empty pleasures that it brings? Or do I trust God and obey His commands?

Do I try to act like God, knowing good and evil, judging good and evil, for myself and everyone around me? Or do I humbly accept that I am a creature, He is the creator, and I cannot be God?

Do I believe the lies that the devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh tell me, convincing me that I need more and more and more, until I am surrounded by the things of the world and have taken everything I can from my neighbor, just to create my own idea of paradise? Or do I trust that God will give me all that I need to support this body and life?

Our flesh tells us that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. But God tells us that a bird in the hand is worth nothing. And that what he has waiting for us is worth everything.

That's what Paul is telling us in our epistle today. He says it over and over again. *"Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day."* Don't worry about satisfying your flesh. It's dying. It's wasting away. The part of you that matters is being renewed by God every single day. Such that it will never die.

"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." The suffering that you go through in this life is momentary compared to what is coming. The afflictions that you are experiencing will be forgotten in the glory of the true paradise that God will give us.

"We look not to things that are seen but to things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." This life, these bodies, the pleasures and selfish pursuits we so frequently run after, all of it is transient. It's temporary. It's momentary. It's fleeting. It's nothing. If you can see it, it's not worth having. The bird in your hand is worthless. Because what God has prepared for you is eternal.

Now, I know it contradicts everything in you to live this way. To think this way. It runs completely contrary to our human nature. I know. I struggle with it too. But we aren't abandoned in this struggle against sin. We have something concrete to cling to. Because as Paul begins this passage, he spells it out for us.

“He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.” If you need a bird in the hand, that's your bird in the hand. If you need to see paradise to believe that God has paradise waiting for you, that's your paradise. If you need to see the wrath of God come crashing down and the mercy of God poured out just like it will be on the last day, that's God's wrath and mercy in a nutshell.

Because it was in God's wrath that He condemned his Son to the cross in our place. It was in his mercy that he sent that Son to save us from our sins. And it was to reveal paradise to us that he raised Jesus from the dead.

So when the devil whispers in your ear, “You will not surely die.” You just tell him, “I have seen God's judgement for sinners, and it looks like his Son dead on the cross.”

And when the devil lies to you and says, “Do it. Eat the fruit. Give in to your temptation. God's holding out on you. It will feel so good. You'll feel so powerful.” You tell him, “I have seen goodness. I have seen God's promises fulfilled. I have seen life. And it looks like an empty tomb. There is nothing you can give me that compares to that.”

In the Garden of Eden, the devil promised Adam and Eve that a bird in the hand was better than two in the bush. But in the end, they got neither. In His Law, God has promised us that two in the bush is better than one in the hand. But in Jesus Christ, we get both. Amen.