Genesis 3 Sermon

**Part A The sin**

We’re continuing to look at the story God tells us about how our world got to be the way it is. We look around and we see disease and death. We see hatred, violence, and warfare. We see dysfunctional relationships at home, at work, and in our nation. Work is hard and life, despite all the good some of us are able to enjoy, never satisfies, because we walk around knowing it could all be gone in an instant.

Even though we are so used to that, God wants us to know that it was not always this way and it was never supposed to be this way. God had placed Adam in paradise. He was surrounded by breathtaking beauty and all sorts of plants and animals made for him to watch over and take care of. He had the perfect spouse, created just for him. They were both created in the image of God. They were righteous and holy. They knew no shame but only glory, honor, and joy as they took care of God’s world for him. They were in perfect harmony with each other, with the world, and with God himself. You could not ask for a better life. Every indication Adam and Eve had told them that God was very good.

But unfortunately, they threw this all away. And it’s heartbreaking to read this story and think about what could have been. But let’s not only hear it that way. Because we are the children of Adam and Eve, and their story becomes our story. No one forces us to sin. We do it of our own free will. And when we do, even though we are born this way, we are nevertheless equally guilty.

So here were Adam and Eve, doing their thing in the garden, and it all seems good, when we hear about a serpent. But this is not a normal serpent. We know from other parts of the Bible this was the devil, but it’s not clear what Adam and Eve knew about it. Did they know that this was a fallen angel talking to them? How did they explain a talking animal? Why did God allow them to be tempted in the first place? There are so many questions we cannot answer here. But let’s not focus on those. Let’s focus on the questions we can answer. Because the way this temptation and fall happens gets repeated in our own lives, over and over again.

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”**

This was quite a crafty question. His first move was to cause confusion. God had never forbidden them from eating any tree. Quite the contrary, he had given them 99.9% of the trees to eat. It was only the one they were not supposed to eat. But this question accomplishes his goal. He gets Eve to start questioning God and his commands.

We start to question what God says. Did God really say lust is so bad? Did God really say I have to repent just for being angry with someone? Did God really say that I am supposed to love him with my whole heart, strength, and mind? That seems excessive…

Satan realizes that it all starts in our mind. Getting us confused about God’s Word and open to questioning God is already halfway there, or more. When Eve responds, you already get a sense that she is a goner:

**2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”**

She corrects the serpent. She probably should have run away. She should have called out to God for help. She should have rebuked him for even questioning God. But instead, she engages. And her answer might seem okay. But on closer examination, she has changed God’s Word. God was very generous. Back in 2:16, he said she could eat from ANY of the trees in the garden. Emphasizing the 99.9%. But she leaves out that word any, making God’s generosity stand out less. Second, she adds to his command. He never forbade them from touching it. But she added this command. This might seem like a minor point, but it’s not, because it involves the death penalty. You cannot obey God if you do not keep straight what he said and what he did not say. And third, Eve leaves out the word “surely” in “you will surely die.”

Do we do this? Do we downplay God’s generosity? He gives us so many good things in life, but where is the focus? Often on the things we can’t have. He gives us rules, and we have a tendency to add to them. We don’t actually keep the rules we make for ourselves, but we will make the extra rules. We make up rules about dieting and exercise. Those are good, but they are not God’s Word. We treat things like politics as though they are on the same level as God’s Word. And we downplay God’s punishments. Would God really send me to hell for just one sin? Could stealing, or borrowing just a little bit really condemn me? Does God really care about just a little bit of gossip? Would God really punish anyone with eternal death?

Make no mistake, God is serious about his law. Of course, we only need to look around us to see how he surely did bring death into this world.

But now that Eve has been knocked back, the serpent is ready for his knockout punch:

**4 “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**

This is a direct contradiction to what God said. She should have been terrified at the thought. But instead, she was already in a doubting frame of mind, and the takes it all the way. Not only does he contradict God, but he even implies that God is not a nice God. God, the one who made them, who gave them that perfect existence they enjoyed. And it’s so funny. They already were like God. They were made in his image. But Satan encouraged them to want more. They wanted to sit in his chair and call the shots. They wanted to decide what was right and what was wrong.

Who are you, God to tell me that I can’t eat from the tree? I can decide for myself thank you. Who are you to tell me I have to spend time with the Bible and in prayer every week. I’ll set my own agenda, thank you. Who are you to tell me to forgive my enemies? I don’t think so. I think the good thing to do here is to teach them a lesson.

It was all a lie. Their eyes were really closed more than opened. They became less like God, not more like him. And they came to know good and evil, but not the way they intended.

I have a quote from a commentary: “Here we have the basic lie which Satan brought into the world (Jn 8:44), the lie that underlies all sin and all the delusions of sin. It is the lie that God and his will are not really good, that man’s welfare and happiness do not lie in clinging to God in humble, joyful trust and in doing his will in thankful love. It is the lie that a person can find happiness by striking out on his own, by pitting his own will and judgment against God’s will.”

**6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.**

These things tempt us today. Bodily pleasures tempt us to disobey God. Beautiful, fine things tempt us to disobey God. The desire to be wise and smart tempts us to doubt God. But sadly, these things often bring ruin and destruction, when we use them contrary to God’s commands. But notice where it all started. Doubting, questioning, confusion. That is why it is so important for us to study God’s Word all the time and simply submit to it. We can ask questions, but only questions that come out of faith, not out of hostility or doubt.

**7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**

Wow. Their idyllic existence was ruined. Their eyes were opened, but not in a good way. They were opened to what shameful people they now were. Instead of loving and serving each other, they were now bend on serving themselves. They were self-conscious. It was so embarrassing that what was not at all shameful before now impelled them to cover themselves right away.

We still live with that shame. And isn’t the what happens whenever we fall to temptation. Satan, or that inner evil voice, impels us on. Do it! It’s no big deal! You know you want to. Give in to your desires, that’s the way to live. But as soon as we do, a flood of shame. We immediately see that those were lies. We shouldn’t have. But now we’re stuck. What do we do? We read together the following Psalm:

**Part B The confrontation**

As the man and woman are wallowing in their shame,

**8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”**

This was the man’s chance to repent. Notice, God is gracious from the beginning. He could have just blasted them right away. But he comes to deal with them slowly. Of course, Adam and Eve before would have been glad to meet God. But now they are hiding. We also tend to hide from God because of our sin, because we sense that we deserve nothing good from him. We’re afraid of him, just like a kid who got caught red handed by his parents or teacher.

**10 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”**

At least he was honest. But notice, the man is not so intelligent now. Does he think God doesn’t know? Does he really think he can hide from God? He sounds like a rambling fool. So do we, quite often, when we make excuses for the things we do wrong, or try to hide them or explain them.

**11 And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” 12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”**

We see how Adam now throws Eve under the bus. There goes “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” It’s all her fault. And how often today don’t we tend to blame all our problems on others, Especially those we are close to, either our parents or our spouse. And it sounds just as pathetic when we do it as it sounds here, if we could only hear ourselves.

**13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”**

Eve is a little more subtle. It’s the serpent’s fault. She doesn’t say, “That serpent you let in here.” But you can almost hear it under her words. I was deceived. Was she really just a victim? Totally passive? No, she was a willing participant. Today in our society, we tend to blame our bad behavior on circumstances beyond our control. As I mentioned last week, America these days, in my opinion, tends to downplay the role of the human’s free will in making decisions. Instead, “society made me do it” is a legitimate excuse.

But it’s not for God. When you go against God’s will, it does not matter who tempted it. It does not matter how bad your parents were or your spouse is. It does not matter what other factors are involved. When you disobey God, you own your sin. And that means you own the penalty. And the penalty for rebelling against an eternal God is eternal death.

Or at least it should be. But now God surprises them. Instead of killing them then and there, he gives them hope. He condemns the serpent without letting them off the hook:

**14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.**

This part was meant as a reminder for all time. Snakes, the kind of animal that Satan used to appear to Eve, are now cursed as a sign that Satan himself is under God’s curse. But this is only a sign. The actual curse is found next:

**15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”**

When Satan said, “You will not surely die,” he drew a line in the sand. He said, “Whose side are you on? God’s or mine? And they picked Satan. But God is here promising that he is going to get them back on his side. He is going to keep humans fighting with Satan always. And eventually there will be an offspring of Eves who will crush Satan’s head. Yes, Satan will strike his heal in the process, but his head will be totally crushed. You can see how this imagine is drawn from a man stepping on a snake and killing it.

Notice, this is completely God’s doing. Adam and Eve were powerless to resist the devil. They had made themselves his slaves and totally alienated themselves from God. But God promised to fix that himself. And he promised that things would reach a culmination in a future figure who would totally destroy the serpent, Satan.

That is what Jesus came to do. What they might now have foreseen is that God himself would be that man. Jesus, God in the flesh, came to undo the Devil’s work. He was struck in the heal when he died on the cross. It cost him. But in the end, because he was the holy Son of God, God raised him from death. He overcame sin by taking the punishment of eternal death we deserved. Because he is the Son of God, he was able to suffer eternal death on the cross, as God the Father turned his back on him. Because he was innocent, God raised him from the dead, overcoming death, the result of sin. This destroyed Satan’s work. This world has been redeemed, that is, bought out of slavery to Satan, and delivered back into God’s control through Jesus.

But this world is still dealing with some serious affects of sin, which we will look at after the next hymn:

**Part C The effects of sin**

So even though he promised to redeem them, God still allowed many painful consequences as the promised result of sin.

**16 To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”**

So, the child bearing process and the marital relations are all messed up now. What should be a joy is often a terror. Because men are bigger and stronger, historically they have often abused women. This is not God’s will! But a result of selfish people in constant conflict. The bigger one usually wins.

**17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food…**

Work was supposed to be fun, but instead, it is a miserable chore. Most people who ever lived barely had enough to eat, so far as we can tell. In fact, the earth started sprouting different kinds of plants. The plants we grow in the field today are much more difficult to turn into food than the original food people it. So perhaps some of you have heard the sarcastic quip, “Life stinks, and then you die…” That pretty much it. Because God says next…

**…until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”**

We experience physical death. Our bodies decay. It’s truly horrifying. If you really contemplate it, it’s terrible and terrifying. That is why we try to put it out of our mind. But it’s always there. Thank God he has promised us a resurrection to a perfect life in a perfect body after this. But for now, let’s remember, whenever someone dies, it is a reminder of sin.

You know that “death with dignity” is legal in this state. The doctor can give you a pill, which your family or friends have to give you at home, that ends your life. This is only for people with terminal illnesses. But there is still no dignity. Nor does God want our deaths to be dignified, nor can we do so. Death is not supposed to be dignified or beautiful have anything good about it. It’s pure evil and terror and horror. At least, outside of Christ. But in Christ is becomes a painful goodbye for us left behind, and a peaceful sleep for those awaiting the resurrection.

We have a few details that often get skipped over in sermons, simply because there is so much to cover. And we will go a little faster. Now we have several little details that wrap up the story:

**20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.**

Why this detail here? It seems a little out of place to me, really, but I think it binds the whole thing together. I think it suggests that the whole fall happened relatively early, before Adam even had time to name Eve.

**21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.**

Some people see this as the first sacrifice in the Bible, and that seems like the best way to understand it to me. God had to kill an animal to get the skin, and they he covered them in its skin. They should have died, but the animal died instead, and now its skin was a continual reminder to them. He was already setting them up for when Christ would come and give the real sacrifice for all of us. This also showed that God had great compassion on them. He realizes how ashamed we are now. He does not want us to experience that shame. Fig leaves were not enough, he invented something more substantial for them. In the same way, God does not want us to be ashamed. He covers your shame with his love and forgiveness.

**22 And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.**

God had another plan. The original plan in the garden had to be scrapped. We could not continue eating from the tree of life. But that is really gracious of God. It would not be a blessing to live forever in this sin-stricken world we find ourselves in. Life is hard and people are cruel. This is not what life was intended to be, because we all try to play God for ourselves and bring hurt, pain, and destruction in our wake.

But there is hope. Jesus says, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

And we have this picture of the city of God, which awaits believers in eternity: (Rev 22): It’s pretty cool that the last chapter in the Bible has so many echoes with these first three chapters of Genesis: If you have never noticed this before, you are in for a real treat:

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”

Stuff I cut: [cut]The Bible is under attack today. Of course Western civilization and the Protestant world was probably the most powerful force for spreading the gospel in human history. The 19th century saw missions expand all over the world. There are few places on earth where the gospel has not at least gained a small presence because of the missionary activity of the 19th and 20th centuries. I remember watching a documentary about some villagers in a very remote village near where C[redacted], Vi…, M…, and L… meet. I remember reading a book about a remote village in T[redacted]. I remember thinking “It would be so cool to take the gospel there.” Later in Hong Kong I met missionaries going to those exact places. It turns out, we even have WELS-affiliated churches there. That was all the work of European and American mostly protestant missionaries.

[cut] Did we really think Satan was going to leave us alone? No. He has attacked our culture with the same confusion regarding God’s Word. In most of Europe and in more “sophisticated” parts of the USA, belief in Adam and Eve, the miracles of Christ, or any truth in the Bible is seen as a sign of idiocy. People believe we have disproved the Bible. If people doubt that God has really spoken, they will tune out what we say before they even have a chance to listen.

[cut] I think Christians in American are actually at a disadvantage over Christians in place where there is persecution. We are constantly bombarded by messages asking, “Did God really say?” Or people confusing the issue. Why do you Christians hate gay people? Wait a minute… we don’t hate gay people. But all of a sudden, we’re on the defensive. And all of a sudden, it hurts our own walks with God. We take his word a little less seriously. Instead of listening to the Bible to hear what God wants us to believe and do, we listen and evaluate, and decide if we think it’s worth believing.