



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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The Wages of Sin

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June 24, 2012 – Trinity 3

There's an old saying—one that comes from the Old Testament book of Numbers (32:23)—that says, "Your sin will find you out." Adam and Eve learned the truth of that saying long, long before it was ever spoken by Moses. That's where we left them last Sunday: their sin had found them out. As we read the first part of the story, we saw how the serpent craftily tempted the man and the woman to sin by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had provided everything for them; he had told them that every tree in the garden was theirs for food; but he had warned them about this *one* tree: "Don't eat its fruit; on the day you eat it, you will surely die."

For them that command was no great burden. Remember, they were living in complete and total innocence. God had provided good things for them and they trusted him perfectly. If he said, "Don't eat the fruit from that one particular tree," they obeyed. They had no good reason to question his command. They didn't obey grudgingly; they obeyed because they trusted that God knew what was best for them. They had perfect faith. And it was into their perfect faith that the serpent knew he needed to drive a wedge if he were going to separate them from God. And so we saw him approach the innocent and naïve woman so that he could craftily twist her faith into doubt and her doubt into rebellion. He started by making God's command sound like something burdensome instead of the good and protective thing that it really was. And once he had her thinking about God's command as a burden, then it was easy to convince her that God was holding out on them—that God had something good and that he was trying to keep it all to himself. The man and the woman believed the subtle lies and they took the fruit and ate it. Instead of

trusting God to provide the good, they decided that they wanted to be able to know good for themselves; they wanted to have good things without reliance on God. That's what underlies *all* our sin: *the attempt to meet our needs or to get what we think is good apart from God.*

Immediately the man and the woman knew something was wrong. Their innocence was gone. The text says that they suddenly realized they were naked. That wasn't a problem when they were living in innocence, when they were living in complete trust of each other. But in their sin, the wife had betrayed her husband and the husband had betrayed his wife. The trust they had had was gone. They realized they were no longer safe with each other and so they tried to clothe themselves with fig leaves—they tried to hide and to protect themselves from each other. But that was only a foreshadowing of what was to come. When we left them last Sunday in verse 8, God had come to the garden to walk and to talk with them as he was accustomed to do. And yet this time, knowing their disobedience, he came in a whirlwind. He came in judgement and the man and the woman ran and hid. God had given them the trees of the garden for sustenance; now they run and use those same trees in a pathetic attempt to hide from God. We'll pick up the story now at Genesis 3:19.

But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

Does God ask the man where he's at because he doesn't know? No, of course not. God knows all. He knew exactly where the man and his wife were. But as God now comes in judgement, he needs to demonstrate to the man and the woman that he is a just judge. He doesn't just swoop down from heaven already knowing the facts and pronouncing sentence. He could have, but he wants his creatures to know that he is just. He wants them to know that as the just King, he will not pass sentence without a careful investigation. Even though it was the man and the woman who violated their relationship of trust, God still seeks to do things in a way that will rebuild and establish their trust in him. Franz Delitzsch writes, "It

was God their creator, who now as God the redeemer was seeking the lost."¹ Already, God is setting his plans for redemption in motion. And so he gives them every reason to have faith that he is good and that he's here for them. So he comes, seeing and knowing the man and the woman are hiding, and he calls them out of the trees by asking where they are. Remember that the man and woman are still very naïve. I don't think it's unfair to say that this confrontation here is a lot like the confrontations we have with our young children when they do something wrong and try to hide.

Imagine walking into the kitchen and seeing the cookie jar lying broken on the floor with cookies scattered around. And as your footsteps echo across the kitchen, you hear the quick pitter-patter of your child's footsteps suddenly running down the hall to his room. You follow him and when you get to his room, you see his feet sticking out from under the bed. You could drag him out and tell him how he's going to pay for the broken cookie jar, but instead you call out, "Billy, where are you?" And as your son realises that your not going to instantly bite his head off, he pushes his way out from under the bed. Look at verse 10 now as the man comes out from the trees.

And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

This is where you notice the bottle of glue that Billy is trying to hide behind his back and you ask, "What's with the glue." And he says, "Oh! I noticed that the cookie jar was broken so I was going to glue it back together." And that's when you, as parent say, "Ah, I see. But how did the cookie jar break? Were you eating cookies when you knew you weren't supposed to?" The man knew he couldn't outright lie to God, but his admission of nakedness as an explanation for hiding gives it all away. God's an all-knowing detective and he leads the man in a line of questioning that forces him to give everything away. In verse 11 God goes on:

¹ Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1888), 1:157.

He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

At this point the man knows he’s sunk, and yet look at what he does in verse 12. He knows that he disobeyed, but he isn’t willing to take responsibility for it.

The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Homer Simpson once said that weaselling out of things is what separates us from the animals (except, of course, the weasel). He was more right than he may have known! Remember how I said last week that our natural tendency when it comes to sin is to shift the blame? If we can blame someone else for it, then we don’t have to take responsibility. We’ve all done it. Parents, you’ve all seen your children do it. And here we have the story of humanity’s first act of sin, and what do the man and the woman do? They try to weasel out of responsibility; they try to shift the blame. The man says, “Okay, God. Yes, I *did* eat the fruit you told us not to eat, *but it wasn’t my fault. That woman you gave me, it’s her fault, she gave it to me to eat!*” The man blames his wife; never mind the fact that he completely abrogated his responsibility to keep her from sin. As soon as the serpent started talking to his wife, the man should have stepped in and put an end to the conversation. And yet the man goes even further. Yes, it’s the woman’s fault, but ultimately he blames it on God: It was the woman *whom you gave to be with me*. “The woman tricked me into it, God. If you didn’t want me to sin *you* should never have given me this Jezebel!”

Why did the man and the woman make clothes for themselves? This is why. They realised they could no longer trust each other and so they tried to come up with some kind of flimsy protection. And they were right not to trust each other. Rather than manning up—and I say “manning-up” with good reason—to protect and take responsibility for his wife, the man throws her under the bus.

At least to her credit, the woman doesn’t blame her husband when God turns his investigation to her. She could have blamed him for not stopping her as he should have done. And yet she isn’t willing to take the fall either. God asks her about her part in this and look at what she says in verse 13:

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

She decided her best bet to avoid responsibility was to fall back on the old “The Devil made me do it” excuse. God plays out plenty of rope and the man and the woman both hang themselves with it. Not only did they both sin by disobeying God’s command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but in just this short investigation, they fully show their loss of innocence and their corrupt state: they refuse to take responsibility for their sin, they shift the blame, they show no repentance, and the man especially, shows the brokenness not only of his relationship with God, but his relationship with his wife.

Even after they sinned, the man and the woman still had every reason to continue to trust God. Now they know why God told them not to eat of that one tree. What happened when they did is proof that God really did have their best interest at heart. They should have come to him in repentance, accepted responsibility, and asked for mercy. Instead they show that they’ve shifted their allegiance. In distorting the truth and in accusing God and each other, they show their new allegiance to Satan.

Beginning in verses 14 and 15 God then pronounces judgement. He starts with the serpent and works his way back to the man.

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The point here isn’t to explain why snakes slither on their bellies. This particular serpent incarnates Satan in the story and so God addresses Satan as the serpent in pronouncing his curse. Remember that a curse is the opposite of a blessing. We’ve seen that to live in obedience to God is to live with his blessing—especially in the case of the man and woman, it was to live in the garden-temple and to have access to the Tree of Life. Here we see that to disobey is to live under God’s curse; it’s to have the blessing not only removed, but to have to live with the consequences of one’s sin.

There are two key points in the cursing of the serpent that are made in verse 15. First, God notes that he will put enmity between the serpent and the woman. This shows us God’s sovereign grace at work. As we’ve seen, when the woman was left to herself, she gave herself, her desires, and her allegiance to the serpent. In that sense she represents all of us in our fallen state. But God sovereignly chooses not to leave her in that hopeless state. In placing enmity between her and the serpent, he uses his sovereign right to change her “religious affections”, to use Jonathan Edwards phrase. God does a work of grace in her heart and changes her affections. He turns her heart away from the serpent and towards himself. He gives her a desire for fellowship with himself.

God chooses to do the same with every one of his elect. Whereas our hearts in their natural and fallen state turn always to the serpent and to sin, God does a work of grace in the hearts of his elect and turns us to himself. The wheels of redemptive history are starting to turn already.

The second key point we see in the curse on the serpent is the Gospel itself. The Church Fathers called verse 15 the “first gospel”, because it so clearly

points to Jesus and to his victory over Satan at the cross. God acknowledges here that the serpent will be allowed a certain measure of power for a time. In fact, God acknowledges that the serpent will bruise the heel of the woman's offspring or seed, but that ultimately it is that offspring of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent and defeat him utterly. We see this at the cross where Satan struck out at Jesus. Imagine the victory party Satan threw for those three days that Jesus was in the tomb. And yet he only bruised the Saviour's heel. On Sunday morning Jesus rose from the dead and in doing so he sealed Satan's doom—he crushed his head.

The next story we'll read in Genesis is about the sons of the man and woman. Cain will murder his brother Abel and the story reminds us that the serpent still has very real power for a time. And yet God gives them (and us) reason to hope. Of course, we all want to know why God didn't simply crush the serpent right then and there. The fact is that God's plan of redemption is for more than our benefit. Ultimately everything he does for us is to display his own glory. Bruce Waltke writes, "God delays defeating him finally to work out his full program of salvation to his glory. Each generation of believers must learn to fight the fight of faith against him."² God's curse here establishes two lines: the descendants of the serpent and the descendants of the woman. The rest of the book of Genesis will show us those two lines, the one as it strays further and further from God and the other as God works out his redemption through its members.

In verse 16 we see God's judgement on the woman:

**To the woman he said,
"I will surely multiply your pain in
childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth
children.
Your desire shall be for your
husband,**

and he shall rule over you."

Because of her sin, the woman's once naturally intimate relationship with her husband will be damaged and her joy in giving birth to children will be mingled with the pain of childbirth. She's lost her authority, and yet in his grace God promises her that through her pain she will be the mother of the Redeemer. Her punishment that she will "desire" her husband and that he will "rule" over her underscores the loss of intimacy between husband and wife. This isn't a good "desire" or a positive "rule". In Hebrew these are the same words used in Chapter 4 when God warns Cain that sin is crouching at his door, "desiring" him, but that he must "master" or "rule" over that sin to control it. The point is that the woman's desire will be to control and dominate her husband, but that her desires will be frustrated by his domination of her. We see this in our fallen and sinful tendencies in our marriage relationships. And yet hope again comes in Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. Through the grace we find in him husbands once again exercise servant headship over their wives, just as Christ does over his Church, even to the point of death, and the wife willingly obeys just as the Church obeys her husband, Christ.

In verses 17 to 19 we see God's pronouncement on the man. Notice too that this is the first time we see *adam* used as his proper name.

**And to Adam he said,
"Because you have listened to the
voice of your wife**

**and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of
you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the
days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring
forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the
field.**

**By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;**

**for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."**

The man's sin was in eating and so his punishment comes in eating. One thing that's important to point out is that work itself is *not* the curse. We often have the idea that Adam didn't have to work in order to eat until after he sinned. That's not true. Work was part of the order of things from the beginning. His duty was to till and to look after the garden. The curse is that the ground will no longer yield its fruits as easily as it had. Adam will now have to wage a constant battle with thorns and thistles. This looks forward to his being cast out of the garden. The garden was watered by a divine stream, but think of Mesopotamia in comparison. Despite its being called the "Fertile Crescent" it's a very arid place and farmers there rely heavily on irrigation systems. From this point on Adam will be forced to scratch the hard earth and to find ways to irrigate his crops. Food won't come easily.

The second part of Adam's punishment reverses his calling to rule over the earth. Now the earth rules over him. He'll spend his life scratching out a living from the dust and when he finally dies, his body will return to that dust. This is the vanity that the author of the book of Ecclesiastes wrote about so eloquently. A man can accomplish much in his life, but when he dies he leaves it to someone else. Eventually his own name is forgotten and his body turns to dust. On the other hand, however, death is a form of blessing. Physical death delivers us from an eternity of spiritual death. In dying we escape from the curse and it's our death that makes possible a future resurrection to eternal life in Christ.

And as God sovereignly turned the desire of the woman's heart toward himself, he does the same for the man. We see the evidence of this in verse 20:

**The man called his wife's name Eve,
because she was the mother of all
living.**

"Eve" is closely related to the Hebrew word for "life". In fact, in the

² Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 265.

Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, Adam names her “Zoe”, which is the Greek word for life. Adam understood that because he had rebelled against God and aligned himself with the serpent he had spiritually died, but he believed God’s promise that through his wife would come one who would one day defeat the serpent and put an end to sin and death. Naming his wife “Life” was an act of faith. It shows that God was at work, turning his heart to himself and graciously giving Adam the gift of saving faith. Have you ever considered that? Adam was redeemed from his sins the same way we are: by faith in Jesus Christ as the one who conquers sin and death. Adam didn’t know his name, but he trusted that God would provide a Redeemer.

In verse 21 we see God take the first steps in teaching his people what that redemption would look like:

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Adam and Eve had tried to cover their sins themselves with flimsy fig leaves. God shows them that we can’t deal with our guilt ourselves or on our own terms. Only he can take away our guilt; only he can cover our sins. He takes away the fig leaves and he gives them clothes that he has made for them. And notice the text is specific: these are clothes made of *skin*. That means that an animal had to die so that their sin could be covered. This was the first sacrifice. An innocent animal paid the price for humanity’s sin. These skins prefigure the sacrifices that will one day take place in the Tabernacle, and all these Old Testament sacrifices, in turn, prefigure Jesus Christ, the one who will offer himself as the truly spotless Lamb of God, once and for all to cover our sins.

And yet as forgiving as God is and as much as he desires fellowship with his creatures, they cannot stay in the temple-garden in their sinful state.

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in

knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24)

God provided for the forgiveness of sins, but the man and the woman were still unholy. They were forgiven, but they were still sinners. And what is unholy cannot remain in the presence of the holy. And so God drove the man and the woman from the temple-garden. It was also necessary to remove them from the source of eternal life until a way had been made to fully redeem them.

It’s interesting that God placed cherubim at the entrance of the garden. They were there to protect the holy place from unholy people. More accurately, perhaps, they were there to protect unholy people from entering God’s holy presence, because the presence of the holy is a very dangerous place for sinners. We see this again when God instructed the Israelites to build the tabernacle. It was the cosmos in miniature, even built with its own “garden”—the Holy of Holies, where God manifested his visible presence with the people. And as Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden for their sin and the way guarded by two cherubim, in the tabernacle, God caused to be put a massive curtain to seal off the Holy of Holies from sinful human beings. His “mercy seat”—the top of the Ark of the Covenant where his presence rested visibly—was guarded, again, by two cherubim just as the way to the garden was guarded.

It was that heavy curtain that kept men and women from the immediate presence of God that was torn in two when Jesus died on the Cross. On that day when he became the once-for-all and perfect sacrifice for our sins, the way back into the holy place, the way

back into the garden, the way back into the presence of God was opened again. And yet just as it was with Adam, the work of the Redeemer is applied to us *only by faith*. We have to admit that we have sinned and we have to humble ourselves before God, giving up the pathetic fig leaves with which we’ve tried to cover ourselves, and instead accepting that it is only the sacrifice of Jesus that can cover us. We have to give up trust in ourselves and in anything we can do and instead trust wholly in Jesus. The good news is that once we’ve put it on, the long, blood-stained robe of Christ’s righteousness covers us as we stand again before God’s throne. Under that robe, God does not see us as sinners, but sees us as he sees his own Son. Through Jesus, God calls us back into the garden so that we can once again have fellowship with him, so that he can love us as he loves his Son and so that we can love and serve him as we were created to do.

Let us pray: Almighty God and Father, you created us to be your servants that you might show you loving goodness to us. Forgive us for rejecting your love. Forgive us for our disobedience and rebellion. In your mercy, graciously turn our hearts away from sin and fix them on yourself. Open our eyes to the Saviour you have given in your Son, Jesus Christ, and help us to let go the fig leaves with which we try to cover our sins and let us take up Jesus, who died as our once-for-all covering. Let us live the new life he gives and let us live it consciously in your presence, back in the garden, back in the Holy of Holies, that we might once again give you the glory and honour you deserve. We ask this through Jesus Christ. Amen.