

In the Beginning

Message 5

The Beginning of Sin

Genesis 3:1-24; Psalm 51:1-12

Introduction

God's creation was magnificent! Even today we are awed by the glory and majesty of the mountains and plains, rivers and oceans, forests and deserts, lush with beautiful plants and teeming with amazing animals. When we look to the sky, we are awed by the beauty and vastness of the heavens; and when we look into cells and molecules, we are astonished by the intricacy of God's work. Creation is wonderful because God is wonderful. And if we were too dull to grasp that, God plainly said that all He did was good. Even the temporary "not good" condition of man without a mate was soon fixed by making a woman for him. To cap it all off, God made Eden, a pleasure garden for Adam and Eve, and gave them the job of taking care of it. God's brand new world was as perfect as a new world could be. All that remained was for Adam and Eve to populate the earth with children like them and together make the whole world into a garden.

The Serpent's Bad Advice

No sooner had God created His wonderful new world and established Adam and Eve as King and Queen in the garden palace, than another character makes his appearance. The serpent came forth to converse with Eve. Now right here in the first verse of this chapter you should immediately see three warning signs that something is dreadfully wrong. First, the text tips us off by saying "the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made." It's not that the serpent was wiser or more intelligent, more skillful. You don't use the word "cunning" to describe a beloved aunt or a respected teacher. It's a word you might use for someone who has the ability to manipulate circumstances for his own good – and not usually for yours. The word chosen deliberately warns us that there is something inherently untrustworthy about the serpent.

Second, the serpent approached the woman. Leadership is not an obscure question in the garden. Adam is clearly in charge. So why did the serpent approach the woman with his question? Third, the question itself is deeply problematic. On the surface it appears the serpent is simply seeking more information about God's command. But the question is cleverly phrased to cast doubt on what God had said. He introduces the word "indeed", which automatically casts doubt on what follows. We might paraphrase the serpent's opening by saying, "Is it really true that God said..." The serpent has difficulty believing this is right, and he creates a similar doubt in the mind of the woman. Then he misquotes God. God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat from one tree – one tree only. Of course they could eat from the others. But the serpent subtly suggests that God is stingy with His trees. So the question, which masquerades as a simple inquiry, is carefully designed to drive a wedge between God and the woman.

But there is another sign that treachery is afoot – an indication of something diabolical; the serpent spoke. Now, if you're familiar with this story, or if you read a lot of fairy tales, you might not think about the incongruity of the serpent's speaking. But remember, there is only one creature on earth which was made in God's image. There is only one creature with personality which can communicate by speaking – and that's man. Whatever their other remarkable abilities, dogs, monkeys, and serpents cannot speak. The mere fact that the serpent spoke should have warned Adam and Eve that an enemy had invaded earth.

Eve was apparently unaware of the danger of her situation, and she gamely proceeded to converse with the serpent. Here we see that Eve was somewhat confused about what God had said, because she did not quote God accurately either. She said God had forbidden them even to touch the tree in the middle of the garden, which was not true. God had forbidden them to eat from it, but He said nothing about touching it. The serpent was no doubt delighted to see that Eve was confused, so he moved in with an even bigger

distortion of the truth, saying, “You will not surely die.” Now if the serpent had stopped there, Eve might have thought to challenge such a bold assertion. But moving quickly, he gave a plausible reason why his statement was true. He said God’s reason for withholding the middle tree was a desire to keep man subordinate to Himself.

You are surrounded by advice. Today you were probably advised that the weather is ugly – or beautiful. Your professor might have advised you that the test was easy, and your friends might have advised you that it was hard. One friend advises you to enter a fraternity and another advises you not to. A classmate IMs you to suggest you study economics together, and friend calls to ask you to the movies. You are constantly surrounded by voices competing for your allegiance, and the direction of your life is determined by the voices you heed. Eve has a choice here. God said she would die if she ate from the middle tree, and the serpent said she would become like God. Who is telling the truth? Her life will depend upon her decision.

Verse six tells us that Eve evaluated her advice empirically. She looked at the tree. and she noticed three things. The tree was good for food. Its fruit wasn’t poisonous. It wasn’t rotten. It was nutritious. It would serve the most important role of food. Eve also noticed that the tree was beautiful. She must have thought, “How could anything so beautiful be so evil?” Then she also considered the serpent’s words, that the tree’s fruit would give her wisdom she didn’t yet possess. So she added up the score, and the tree wins – three to zero! She could see no reason to avoid the tree, so she took it’s fruit and ate. And being a generous person, she gave some to Adam also.

The Lord’s Visit

The effect was instantaneous! The serpent was right after all; they did gain knowledge from eating the forbidden fruit. They immediately saw that people who disobey God are naked. In their fear and dismay they smacked together some clothes of fig leaves to cover their embarrassment and shame. And they waited for the inevitable.

Most of our translations say “they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden...” The Hebrew word for “sound” has a wide range of meanings. It can mean voice, cry, sound, thunderclap, etc. In context, I think here it is best understood as the crashing of the avenging Lord come to discover who has disobeyed Him. This is not the gentle Jesus softly whispering love verses to you by the rose bushes. This is the divine Godzilla storming across the countryside to crush you underfoot! So Adam and his wife fled from God and hid from Him. They were guilty, they were dead – and they knew it. As God advanced upon them, cornering them in the garden, terror washed over them. So God called to Adam, “Where are you?” Adam wisely answered with the truth, “I heard Your noise in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” But in so doing he condemned himself, for he had no concept of nakedness when he was created. It was obvious he had eaten from the forbidden tree.

The secret is out. Now comes the judgment. God tried Adam, found him guilty, and rendered a verdict. God pressed the case by asking, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Notice Adam’s answer. Did Adam tell the truth? Well, yes – sort of. What he said was true, but it wasn’t a direct yes-or-no answer. Adam’s answer suggested that he wasn’t the one at fault. *The woman* was the one who took the fruit. *She* led him into this sin. Adam was just minding his own business until she screwed up everything. Furthermore, *God* saddled Adam with this woman. *He* had created her. It was *His* idea in the first place. Everything was fine in the garden until God made this new creature. Obviously she was defective. God made a good effort, but He didn’t make the woman quite right.

Perhaps the most amazing thing in this passage is God’s patience in simply overlooking this blasphemous suggestion that He is the one at fault. Adam’s reply should have earned him a one-way ticket

to hell on the spot, but God just let it pass. Instead He turned to the woman to see what she would say for herself. Like her husband, Eve also told a partial truth. Yes, she ate. But it was the serpent's fault. He was behind it all. "Don't look at me, God. I didn't mean to eat that scrumptious, dazzling, wisdom-giving fruit. I was minding my own business obeying your commands. Then that nasty serpent got me all mixed up. I thought I was doing the right thing by disobeying you. Go find that snake and punish him"

So did you notice what happened to the man and the woman? Did you see that their answers were just as crafty as the serpent's? Do you know what that means? At the pivotal point in the history of the human race, man had to choose whether to follow God's word, or the serpent's. It was a choice of masters. God explicitly demanded obedience from Adam and Eve. The snake offered freedom from God. What he didn't tell them was that disobedience to God meant bondage to the serpent. Now they have made their choice, they have bound themselves to the serpent, and they have become like him. Now they will go through life distorting the truth, deceiving themselves and others, blaming everyone else for their sins, and terrified of God's judgment. With one bite the King and Queen of the earth have become the slumlords of sin.

From here on God efficiently dispatches justice. The serpent is condemned to an eternity of groveling, hatred, and finally death. Mankind is condemned in the place where he should have most found pleasure and fulfillment. The woman's delight in bearing children is turned to pain and anguish. And if she should think to avoid that pain by remaining single, God put within her an irresistible desire for a man – and that man shall rule her. The man's joy in his work was turned to sorrow and frustration. He will cross the globe trying to tame the earth, but every success turns to failure as the thorns inevitably reclaim the gardens he makes for himself. And finally, man will wither into the dust from which he was made. Adam, the majestic, glorious King of the earth, will become a rotten corpse, food for worms and forgotten by everyone.

Adam's Failure

This is our legacy. We were born into this world of pain, sorrow, death, and destruction. It's not our fault, is it? We didn't eat the fruit. We weren't even there. The damage was already done when we arrived on earth. We're just doing our best to get by. When we look to see who's at fault, the one thing we know for sure is that it's not us. Even if we distort the truth, deceive ourselves, and blame others, it's not our fault.

Who's fault is it? If God is sovereign over all things, it must be God's fault. He could have prevented the serpent from entering the garden. He could have spoke up to refute the serpent's twisted argument. He could have stepped in to keep Eve from taking the fruit. Why did God let all this happen? Now, after 6,000 years of untold suffering, why did God let all this happen? It's true that God could have prevented the fall into sin. But to do so would have been to diminish man. If man were just another animal this never would have happened. But man is the image of God. As such he has the glory of God on earth, but he also has the responsibility of God on earth. The two must go together. Glory means nothing without responsibility, and responsibility means nothing without glory. Man would not be human without the responsibility to choose between good and evil. God could have made him to eat, sleep, and procreate like the cows, but then he would not be God's image. Of course we could wonder why God wanted to place His image on earth, or why He even made the universe as it is. And of course these questions are shrouded in mystery. We can't know why God decided to do all He has. But within the context of the creation as it is, it's impossible to lay any blame at God's feet for man's moral failure.

Is the serpent at fault? Sure. He, whoever he is, invaded the earth in the guise of a serpent and wreaked havoc on God's creation. The serpent is obviously the source of evil and deserves to be punished severely. And He will be. But simply destroying the serpent doesn't remove the problem of sin from the earth. The damage has been done. The change in the human race was permanent. So this forces us to look for others who are at fault.

Is Eve at fault? Again, no doubt. The evidence is inescapable. She knew not to eat, but she ate. She disobeyed, and she should be punished. And she is.

Who's left? What about Adam? Is he guilty? Of course. He also disobeyed, like Eve. But Adam's case is significantly different. Eve at least claimed to be deceived. Adam made no such claim. It's embarrassing that Eve was duped by the snake, but it's even worse that Adam wasn't. Eve allowed herself to be confused by the serpent. That in itself was a sin. She should have known God's word well. She should have clung to God's word, regardless of what anyone else should say. Eve's first sin was not eating the fruit, it was continuing the conversation with the serpent. But having allowed herself to be confused, she fell further into sin without fully understanding what was happening.

But not Adam. Adam knew full well what was happening. Adam knew the serpent lied, but he ate the fruit anyway. Why? Why did Adam commit suicide? Was his love for Eve so great that he was unwilling to go through life without her? I doubt it. Look, later that day he attempted to clear himself by blaming Eve for his sin! Adam clearly understood God's word that whoever ate the fruit would die, so why did he do it? Furthermore, why did he let Eve eat? Did you notice where Adam was while Eve was eating? Verse six tells us he was *with her*! Do you see what was going on? Adam stood there, knowing exactly what was going on, and watched his wife eat the fruit. How can we explain this? Perhaps he was waiting to see what would happen. After all, if Eve ate the fruit and lived, it would be safe for him to eat the fruit also.

Adam is the evil villain in this story, for as we continue to examine it, we see that he abdicated his responsibility at every turn. Adam's fundamental responsibility, his irreducible minimum requirement was to tend and guard the garden. Here an intruder entered – and it was obvious that this was an intruder. Normal serpents don't speak, and good creatures don't question God's word. This is exactly what Adam was supposed to guard against. What should Adam have done? He should have crushed the serpent's head. This was a man's job, and Adam failed. He was called to destroy the wretched beast, but he didn't have the guts to do it. Adam was a coward. Furthermore, Adam was supposed to teach Eve God's commands. Did you notice that she wasn't present when God told Adam about the trees? It was Adam's job to pass on God's word. He did a pretty poor job of it. And when we wondered why God didn't step in and argue with the serpent, God didn't have to, because His image was there. It was Adam's job to make sure His wife knew what God said and didn't get confused. Adam failed to guard his wife from the serpent and he failed to nourish her in God's word.

A word to you as you seek a husband or wife. Men, your primary responsibility is to guard and teach your wife. Speaking of Jesus in Ephesians, Paul said, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word." (Ephesians 5:25-26) Jesus' relationship with the church the model for your relationship with your wife. Jesus died for the church and is purifying her with his word. You must guard your wife to the point of death, and teach her the scripture. No success in other areas of life will make up for your failure in this. Women, look for a man whom you can trust to protect you and help you understand the Bible. Don't let yourself get tangled up with someone who doesn't have the guts to guard you or the ability to teach you.

But back to Genesis – all this happened so long ago. Why must we still suffer the effects of Adam's sin? Why do I pay for Adam's rebellion against God? Why am I not responsible only for my own sin? When God made man, He did not make a collection of individuals. God made a race. A race is individuals bound by a common nature and possessing a collective nature. Just as your body is made of many parts and each one is distinct and operates in its own way, the human race consists of many individuals who are distinct and operate in their own ways. But when your body goes to class, all the parts go along. When your body gets sick, all the parts get sick, too. The flu may originate in your sinus cavities, but your whole body is affected. Likewise the human race is jointly affected, particularly by Adam. For Adam was the first, the

king, and the head of our race – and all who are descended from him partake of his nature. So we all are sinful, distorting the truth, deceiving ourselves, and blaming others for our sin, like Adam. It's our nature.

The First Gospel

But here in the darkest place in the story, in the midst of the curses for the rebellion, God offered a ray of hope. To the serpent He said, “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” Did you catch the significance of this statement? God said He would cause the descendants of the serpent and of the woman to hate each other. There will be eternal war between the seeds. The descendants of the serpent will deeply wound the woman's children. From generation to generation the suffering will be great, but in the end, the woman's seed will crush the serpent's head. Brothers and sisters, this is nothing less than the gospel! In the very moment of judgment, when God should have been destroying man for his sin, instead He promised to save him! That in itself is wonderful news. That is a message which should make us delirious with excitement and joy! Salvation is coming! But what's even more amazing is that God will use a man to save man. Man, the cowardly failure, will be given the chance to destroy the enemy of the human race. And also, this means that Adam and Eve will live – not forever, but long enough to bear a child. They, who cowered under God's intense anger, waiting to be destroyed, were blessed with the promise of life.

Brothers and sisters, the question before us all is this: will you believe God's word, or not? Who is telling the truth, God or Satan? Who will you follow, God or someone else? This is always the question before us – every day, in every conversation, in every decision. Adam refused to believe God's first word, and he died spiritually. Now God spoke again, and Adam believed him. How do we know? The evidence is in verse 20. “And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.” Adam believed God's promise that his wife would live to bear a child to save them from the serpent. And Adam expressed his faith by giving his wife a name appropriate to her role. Adam believed that God would be faithful to His promise and would save them by a child his wife would bear.

Then God gave Adam a sign of the new covenant – clothing of skins. Adam believed in God, and God considered it righteousness. The sign of God's acceptance of Adam was the skins which God made by sacrificing His own precious animals, shedding their blood instead of Adam's blood.

We should respond to our sin by confession, not be denial or blame-shifting. Psalm 51 is a good example of this. Let's read it together.

Psalm 51

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; *
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, *
And cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, *
And my sin is always before me.
- 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, *
And done this evil in Your sight;
That You may be found just when You speak, *
And blameless when You judge.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, *
And in sin my mother conceived me.
- 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, *
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; *
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Make me hear joy and gladness, *
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.
- 9 Hide Your face from my sins, *
And blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, *
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, *
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

We live now in the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, who came and crushed the serpent's head. If you believe the words of Jesus, you will be made a part of His new human race – a race which has escaped the punishment of sin and is part of the new universe Jesus is creating for us. If you are not part of this new race, don't remain mired in sin. Stop listening to the many voices of the serpent. Listen to Jesus! Believe His word. and enter into real life forever.

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