

## In the Beginning

The Curse (Genesis 3:7-20)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on February 27, 2022

### Introduction

- ❖ This week we were reminded that this world we live in is a dangerous place. For weeks, we've been hearing news that Russia was on the brink of invading another sovereign nation. To topple Ukraine's government and replace it with one more friendly and subservient to Russia. Well, this past week, that invasion began. **Not since World War II have we seen, on the European continent, a war like this between two sovereign nations.**
  - Many assumed that – with the rise of modern nation-states, developed economies, and global alliances – that, because of these developments over the last seventy-five years, warfare and aggression like this would be a thing of the past. We would have evolved beyond these primitive, savage instincts.
  
- ❖ But this week is a stark reminder that some things never change. **Bloodshed, violence, and war has marked (and will continue to mark) the human experience.** There is something in our nature that traps us in these sinful cycles. These destructive patterns are expressed – not only on the world stage – but as well in our homes and hearts. Now we might experience seasons of relative peace and stability. But such illusions are dispelled by events like this.
  - So let us pray for this war to end quickly; for the aggression to cease immediately; for the protection and preservation of life among the people of Ukraine; and for the gospel witness of the Ukrainian Church during an existential crisis such as this.
  
- ❖ But in order to help us pray – to know what to pray for – **we need to know why human beings can't seem to stop hurting each other and fighting each other.** Well, in God's good providence, we just so happen to be in *the* very passage of Scripture that directly explains why. The answer revolves around a couple, a snake, and a curse. **According to Genesis 3, this world – and all who live therein – are under a curse.**
  - Now that word might confuse you. We typically use the word “curse” in reference to profanity (i.e. uttering a curse word) or as a synonym for having bad luck (i.e. my team is cursed to never win the championship). But in Scripture, a curse – when attributed to God – is not just an utterance or a reference to bad fortune. **God's curse is the opposite of his blessing.** When he blesses you, his face shines upon you, and you receive the goodness that you do not deserve. But when he curses you, his face is turned from you, and you receive the punishment you do deserve.
  
- ❖ **So when God cursed the world and the human race, it was an act of justice – an act of judgment.** He turned his face away. He gave us over to the sinful desires of our hearts (Rom 1:24). And to this day, our world (and our lives) are reaping the consequences. **All of this pain and suffering, violence and aggression, are the results of the Curse.** In Genesis 3, humanity sowed the wind, and ever since we've been reaping the whirlwind (Hos 8:7).
  - So the plan is to walk through Genesis 3:8-20 and to look more deeply at the consequences of this Curse. We see the Curse manifest itself in four different ways: (1) the curse of psychological shame, (2) the curse of spiritual hostility, (3) the curse of relational discord, and (4) the curse of vocational distress.

## The Curse of Psychological Shame

- ❖ Let's begin by considering the first consequence of the Curse – psychological shame. Before we make any attempts to understand all the problems on the world stage, we need to examine ourselves. To understand how sin has cursed the way we view God and view ourselves. **You can make the case that this curse of psychological shame underlies and explains all forms of human aggression.** The alienation and hostility experienced between nations can be traced back to the alienation and hostility that individuals experience in relation to God.
  
- ❖ **So let's look back to see how this all started – how shame ended up dominating our psychological state.** Now our text starts in Genesis 3:7. Prior to this, Adam and Eve just ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – the one tree, among the many in the garden, that was explicitly off limits.
  - Genesis 2 had ended with Adam and Eve married, naked, and unashamed. **But after they sinned – after they ate from the tree – what was previously a sign of a healthy relationship (characterized by openness and trust) became a sign of unhealth (characterized by shame and distrust).** They attempted to cover up their nakedness – to cover up their shame – and tried to hide from God among the trees.
  
- ❖ **Now it's important to recall what we said last week about Adam and Eve not just being guilty of law-breaking but being guilty of law-making.** Of trying to be like God to determine for themselves good from evil, right from wrong. That's what sin is.
  - **Perhaps you've heard sin described as missing the mark. Missing the mark of God's perfection.** Falling short in the keeping of his law. And there's truth to that because the Greek word for *sin* is related to the archery term for missing the mark.
  
- ❖ But if that's all sin is, then we'll be tempted to see ourselves as not that bad off. Sure, we're not perfect. We don't always hit the bullseye. But we're much better shots than those people. **But in Scripture, sin is not just missing the target of God's perfection. Sin is pointing your bow at God and letting the arrow fly.** Sin is defiance. It's open rebellion against God.
  
- ❖ Now there is a legitimate sense of shame that should be felt by any rebel who turns against his good and loving king. Shame is not a bad thing in and of itself. **There is such thing as a good form of shame – good shame.** If we betray a friend's trust, it's right to feel shame. If we dishonor our parents because they can be overbearing – even though we know they're just trying to help – then feeling ashamed of what we said is a good thing.
  - **Good shame is the appropriate response to our sinfulness.** Good shame leads us back to God with a contrite heart and towards those we offended with humble confession. But then there's bad shame. **Bad shame triggers us to excuse our behavior; to cover our sin; to hide from God; and to avoid those we hurt.**
  
- ❖ That's what we see motivating Adam and Eve – bad shame. It results in them hiding in the trees. Hoping to avoid the holy gaze of God. That's man in his natural state – in hiding.

- ❖ Now notice God in his natural state – seeking. Look at to v9, “*But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”*” Did you notice the kindness in the LORD's line of questioning? **The mere fact that he asked a question versus just commanding Adam to come out of hiding speaks volumes.** Consider the question God asked, “Where are you?”
  - **That forces Adam to pause and look around – to reflect on the terrible position he finds himself in.** He’s never been in this position before – hiding from the God who loves him. Notice God didn’t ask, “Why are you hiding?” **That would’ve only encouraged Adam to come up with excuses for his behavior.** That would’ve triggered his fleshly instinct to justify his actions. That won't help the situation.
    - **So God doesn’t focus on the reasons why you sinned but on the terrible consequences of your sin.** We’re not here to debate why you did it. We’re here to expose what it’s done to you. Look at where you are.
  
- ❖ There’s a good lesson we can apply to our attempts to confront others over their sin. **Instead of trying to engage them on the validity or rightness of their choices, it’s often more beneficial to help them see the harmful consequences of those choices.** Don’t just ask why did you do it. Instead ask, “How is that working for you? Where has it led you? Are you happy there?” Because, in the end, they’re not going to come out of hiding until they see how terrible and lamentable their current situation has become.
  
- ❖ Now when we return to the text, it's lamentable that Adam still responds as if God did ask, “Why did you hide?” He offers excuses. Look at v10, “*And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”*”
  - He says he was afraid. A fear of God led him to hide. **Now just like with shame, there is a good and bad form when it comes to fearing God.** A healthy fear of God would lead you towards him in confession and repentance. It’s the unhealthy fear of God that drives you away under the impression that God is harsh and merciless.
    - **So at this point, Adam is driven by an unhealthy fear of the LORD and a bad form of shame** (symbolized by a nakedness that engenders feelings of guilt and judgment). And that’s why he hid himself.
  
- ❖ Keep reading in v11, “*He [the LORD] said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”*” Again, notice the way God phrases his questions. Not in an accusatory way. He didn’t ask, “Why did you eat of that tree?” He merely asked, “Have you?” **God is leading Adam to self-discovery.** To be convicted of his own sin. To confess of his own volition.
  - But again, listen to another lamentable response in v12. “*The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”*” **He immediately shifts blame onto the woman for giving him the fruit.** And even onto God for giving me this woman as a helpmate. And notice how he mentions his actions last. Like he’s trying to minimize his own contribution. He’s minimizing his sin.

- ❖ Now when God turns to the woman, she responds in like manner. She shifts the blame onto the serpent. Look at v13, *“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.””*
  - The serpent, with its crafty lies, was able to get the man and the woman to doubt that God had their best interest in mind when he told them to obey his rule about that tree. They concluded that God must be holding back his best, holding back true joy.
  
- ❖ But now where are they? Hiding in the trees with flimsy fig leaves, trying to cover their psychological shame. They feel the weight of that shame, which makes them quick to blame. To try to shift the blame and the shame onto someone else. **And notice how miserable they are – even before God has the chance to punish them.** He’s only been asking questions.
  - **If they felt so miserable even before experiencing any punishment for disobedience, then it’s clear that obedience – while it certainly is for God’s glory – is also for our good!** We forfeit so much joy when we live in disobedience.
  
- ❖ Think about the shame you feel – the shame you’ve been trying to ignore or trying to cover up. What if that shame could be transformed into a good shame? **Could it be that that shame is a reminder to come out of hiding and return to the LORD?** For in his presence there is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps 16:11).

### **The Curse of Spiritual Hostility**

- ❖ So the first consequence of the Curse is psychological shame. The second is spiritual hostility. **This Genesis 3 curse incited a perpetual animosity between two lines of progeny.** The wars and conflicts of our day are terrible, but they’re mere skirmishes in comparison to this ancient, primordial struggle.
  - Listen to God’s words as he turns his attention to the serpent. We said last week that the serpent represented Satan himself, the great deceiver and accuser of the saints. Look at v14, *“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.”*
    - Genesis is not suggesting that snakes used to have four legs until God cursed them. **No, the point is that crawling on your belly and eating dust are idioms that forecast the humiliation and total defeat that Satan is destined for** (Ps 44:25; 72:9; Isa 65:25; Micah 7:17)
  
- ❖ You see, at this point, the devil thought he won. He just succeeded in deceiving God’s people and turning them against him. They joined the dark side. So he was walking out of that garden, head high in victory. **But then God speaks and proclaims what has been called the protoevangelium, which means the first good news (the first gospel).** Look at v15. God says, *“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.”*

- ❖ Notice three declarations. **First, he declares enmity between the serpent and the woman.** At the start of Genesis 3, the woman and the serpent were friendly. She was convinced he had her best in mind. But now there's enmity between them.
  - **Second, the Lord declares enmity between the offsprings of the serpent and the woman.** We're talking about an ancient struggle between two lines of progeny. **There is only one human race, but there's a spiritual distinction being made between the offspring of the woman and that of the devil.**
  
- ❖ Now when we speak of the devil's offspring, we're not suggesting the devil fathered children. We're talking about those who share in his works. Those who continue to resist God and his people (Jn 8:44). Who persist in a practice of sinning (1 Jn 3:8). Just like the devil. **Such people are locked in a perpetual battle with another line of progeny who do the exact opposite, who trust God and practice righteousness.**
  - You see this struggle played out from Genesis 3 onward. Cain (who represents the devil's offspring) kills Abel (who represents the woman's). Then we meet Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and read of the opposition they faced. But just as you think this is leading to an epic battle between two armies of descendants, v15 adds a twist, "*he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" **The twist is the sudden shift to singular pronouns.** "*He shall bruise your head.*"
  
- ❖ **God's third declaration is that a champion will one day rise from the line of the woman to defeat the serpent once and for all.** This champion will represent the woman's offspring on the battlefield and fight on their behalf. He'll face the ancient serpent alone.
  - And his victory won't be merely a personal victory. As our champion, his victory will extend to all of God's people and be our victory. **The good news of v15 is the promise that this offspring of the woman will surely defeat that ancient serpent.**
    - But our hero will suffer a great wound in the process. It says the serpent will bruise his heel. So they'll both inflict damage to each other. **But since it's the serpent's head in view versus merely the hero's heel, this prophecy clearly signals a final defeat of the devil.**
  
- ❖ His doom is sure. But until then, Satan will do all he can to oppose the people of God. To waylay their efforts to follow and do God's will. **From the persecution of the global church to the private temptation of individual believers – that ancient serpent will give no rest.** Wounded and cornered animals are the most dangerous. So *because* he has a mortal wound, *because* his doom is sure, we should be all the more weary of the devil and his schemes.

### **The Curse of Relational Discord**

- ❖ Let's consider a third consequence of the Curse – that being, relational discord. Conflict on a global scale and attacks from the spiritual realm are no doubt dreadful, but what is far more common are conflicts and attacks within the home and among your cherished relationships. **All the relational discord and strife you experience stems back to this moment.**

- Listen to God’s words to the woman in v16. *“To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”*
  
- ❖ God’s original blessing to the woman was a one-flesh union with her husband (2:25) and the fruitfulness of children (1:28). But that’s where she’s been cursed. **In precisely the two areas of great blessing, she will experience the painful consequences of sin.**
  - Consider how childbearing is now cursed. The birth pangs that Eve will experience every time she bears another child will serve as a reminder of the Curse. **But in God’s goodness, those birth pangs will also remind her of the hope in God’s promise a verse earlier.** That through pain and suffering, a child will be born – one who will defeat sin; defeat the serpent; and restore God’s blessings back to his people.
  
- ❖ But until then, the curse extends in v16 to her relationship with her husband. *Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.* That word for desire is used again in **Genesis 4:7**. There it’s referring to sin’s desire to dominate and control Cain. After his offering was rejected, Cain stewed in anger, and in that emotional state he was more susceptible to sin. So God warns him that sin is like a crouching lion – ready to pounce on you to dominate you. *“Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”*
  
- ❖ So in light of that verse, that means the desire Eve will now have for her husband is like the desire of sin when it was ready to pounce on Cain to dominate him. **A relationship of equality and complementarity will turn into a relationship of dominance and control.**
  - And her sinful husband will likewise respond sinfully and try to rule over her. **Loving headship from the husband will be twisted into ugly chauvinism. And beautiful submission on the part of the wife will be misperceived as a sign of weakness.** Instead of serving together as equals – exercising dominion over creation – the couple will be in competition with each other. Each trying to dominate and control the other.
  
- ❖ **Marital strife is illustrative of all the relational discord we experience as a result of the Curse.** Because what’s at the source of all our relational problems – at home, among friends, in the classroom or workplace – is a desire to dominate. To exert our will over others. It’s because of our failure to humbly submit and put the interest of others before our own. Why do you have relational problems? Fundamentally, it’s because of the Curse.

### **The Curse of Vocational Distress**

- ❖ Let’s conclude by considering a fourth consequence of the Curse – vocational distress. We find this in God’s words to Adam starting in v17, *“<sup>17</sup>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; <sup>18</sup>thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>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 pain will be physical like the woman's in that he will struggle in his primary vocation. He was called in chapter 2:15 to work the garden and keep it. To cultivate the land. **But suddenly, what once was fulfilling and fruitful has been transformed into something frustrating and frequently fruitless.**
- ❖ **Work has now become laborious.** Cursed is the ground, it says. The earth experiences the corrupting effects of our sin, and now it's stingy in giving up its crops. The earth produce thorns and thistles instead.
  - Think of the farmer's frustration over failed crops, unpredictable weather, irritating pests, destructive diseases, and endless weeding. That's illustrative of the modern worker's frustration over jammed printers, crashed computers, workplace politics, unproductive meetings, and monotonous tasks. All of that is evidence of the Curse.
- ❖ **We ate what we shouldn't have. So now to eat what we should will involve toilsome labor.** We failed in our original vocation in the garden. So now, in the city, our vocations will be laborious and often feel fruitless.
  - We feel like we can never accomplish all we set out to do. **No matter how many goals we achieve, we always seem to be asking ourselves, "What next?"** There's always another degree to get, another promotion to receive, another rung of the ladder to climb. You'll never finally "make it" because every time you get to the top, you realize there's another ladder – and a taller one – to climb.
    - And sadly v19 says there won't be any relief until we return to the dust. **Apparently we won't be free of the fatigue and exhaustion of work until we die.** Which itself is a consequence of sin – a part of the Curse.

### The Hope of the Offspring

- ❖ Friends, I know all of that sounds pretty bleak. **This Curse is so comprehensive and so catastrophic.** It's made our work tiresome and frustrating. It's ruined our relationships. It's made us the target of the devil. And it's filled us with shame.
  - Genesis 3 paints a very dark picture. But notice the glimmer of hope in v20. Adam certainly feels the weight of the Curse, but all hope is not lost. **With faith only the size of a mustard seed, he gives his wife a new name – the name she's best known for.** Listen to v20, *"The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."*
- ❖ **Naming her Eve – the mother of all the living – is an act of faith.** It signals that Adam doesn't think he and his wife will be the first and last of the human race. No, in faith, he believes that God will mercifully grant them offspring. **She will be a mother. And one day our Redeemer will be born.** The One who will bruise the serpent's head, who will redeem God's people and reverse this curse.

- ❖ Think about it. The source of all our shame revolved around a tree. And when the first couple fled, it was to the trees to hide their shame. And later on, the Law of Moses would designate the tree as a cursed place of punishment for those deserving death (Deut 21:22-23).
  - **All of that background is important to understand the story of the gospel as it unfolds with the Son of God being nailed to a tree.** There on that cursed tree, Jesus atoned for our sins and covered our shame by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree*” (Gal 3:13).
    - On the cross, God turned his face away from his Beloved Son. **God cursed him for our sake.** In order that the curse might be removed from us. That his face might turn towards us. That his blessings might be poured on us in abundance. That’s the hope for all who trust in Jesus.
  
- ❖ Christian, you are not cursed. No matter how unlucky you feel or how discouraged and disappointed you feel. No matter how much life isn’t going your way. **If you are in Christ, you are not cursed.**
  - But this world still is. It’s still under the Curse. That’s why you still get discouraged and why people disappoint you. That’s why life doesn’t always go your way. But because of Christ, this too shall pass and one day the Curse will be gone for good.
  
- ❖ In the last chapter of the Bible, in **Revelation 22:3**, it says that in the New Earth – when God’s kingdom has fully and finally come – “*no longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.*”
  - That’s our hope in Christ. **That sins and sorrows will no more grow; nor thorns infest the ground; because Christ comes to make his blessings flow; far as the curse is found.**