

## In the Beginning

The Fall (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-8)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on February 20, 2022

### Introduction

- ❖ One of the joys of parenthood has been to share stories and enjoy stories with my kids. That could mean sharing movies that I loved growing up. My oldest is at an appropriate age to watch and appreciate some of my favorite movies. But from an early age, I've been able to share stories with her through books. Through bedtime reading. And before long, she grew a real taste for good storytelling.
  - I remember, whenever I would start a new book, she would ask, "Daddy, what's the problem? What's the problem?" In her childlike way, she was trying to identify the primary conflict in the narrative. **Because even little children know that all good stories have a problem that needs to be resolved.**
    - When my daughter was old enough to begin writing her own stories, she knew the plot had to revolve around a problem. So every time she would show me a new story, I would ask her, "What's it about? What's the problem?" And she would have a clearly laid-out problem that would be sorted out by the end.
- ❖ That's what makes for a good story. And that's what makes the Bible's overarching narrative such a good, compelling story. **It's not surprising that the Bible is the best-selling book of all time.** According to research put out last year by the British and Foreign Bible Society, an estimated 5 billion copies have been sold. No other book, no other story, comes close.
  - **I would argue that that's because the Bible's central plot revolves around a problem that is universally recognizable and relatable.** No matter what time period a person lives in. No matter what culture they're from. No matter their life experience. Everybody everywhere who hears the storyline of Scripture will recognize themselves in this story. We can relate to its central conflict. We can identify with its problem. That's why the Bible offers such a good, compelling story.
- ❖ **Any worldview, any religion, any philosophy worth any consideration needs to offer an explanation for what's wrong with the world.** How did we get here? Why is there so much suffering? Why do people hurt each other? Why are we so selfish? Why do natural disasters wipe out hundreds to thousands of lives? Just read the headlines in the past week. Wars and rumors of war. Senseless killings. The exploitation of the young, the weak, the vulnerable. Scandals and smear campaigns. You just can't deny this world has problems.
  - **If your story – that is, the overarching story you understand yourself to be living in – if it doesn't have an adequate answer for why bad things happen, then perhaps you're in the wrong story.** I would commend to you the story of the Bible. Consider the Christian explanation for what's wrong with the world, and see if that corresponds with your experience. See if you can recognize yourself in this story.
- ❖ This morning we're in Genesis 3. **This is where the Bible gets straight to the point and answers, "What's the problem?"** Last week, we ended Genesis 2 with the first couple happily married, naked, and not ashamed. But in just a few verses, in chapter 3:7, we find them naked, ashamed, and attempting to cover themselves up. Something happened. Something that can explain all the human suffering, strife, and sadness in the world.

- ❖ Let's consider the problem by walking through vv1-8 and considering five movements: (1) The serpent's crafty lie, (2) The woman's creeping doubt, (3) The tree's central significance, (4) The couple's costly choice, and (5) The couple's cheap covering

### The Serpent's Crafty Lie

- ❖ We begin with the serpent's crafty lie. Listen to chapter 3:1, "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*" One thing we've already noticed in Genesis is the use of Hebrew wordplay – where the author uses two Hebrew words that sound similar to indicate some kind of connection. **Commentators point out that Genesis 2 ended in v25 with the Hebrew word “naked” (*arummim*), which sounds a lot like the word for “crafty” (*arum*).** That use of wordplay signals – not only a transition into a new scene in the story – but a contrast is being made between the couple's innocence (symbolized by their nakedness) and the serpent's cunning.
  - Now who is this serpent? **Elsewhere in Scripture, it's identified with Satan himself** (Rev 12:9; 20:2). I think it's significant that the serpent is described as a creature "*that the LORD God had made.*" Emphasizing that Satan is a created being. He's not the yin to God's yang. God and Satan are not two rival, dualistic powers of good and evil. **No, Satan is a creature like us.**
    - But he's not like us in that he was created as an angel to serve the LORD in his heavenly abode. Genesis doesn't address his fall into sin, but other Scriptures do hint at a rebellion against God by angelic beings, which resulted in them being cast down to earth. Satan was chief among these angelic rebels who became what the NT describes as demons or evil spirits.
- ❖ Now all of that occurred prior to Genesis 3. Here he's introduced, in the form of a serpent, using crafty lies to call into question the wisdom of God. The word “crafty” is used elsewhere to refer more generally to wisdom. Couple that with the observation, later in v6, that the tree was desirous to make one wise. **And it suggests the devil was tempting Eve to not just disobey God's rules but to distrust his wisdom.** Can you really trust the wisdom behind God's rules? Maybe you know better? Maybe you're wiser than him?
- ❖ Just consider the question he posed to the woman. Look again at v1, "*He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”*" The serpent was crafty enough to know that the most effective lies carry a hint of the truth. **So he takes God's true words, and he exaggerates them!**
  - Compare his question to what God actually said back in chapter 2:16, "<sup>16</sup>*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.”*" Notice what the serpent is doing. God said they may surely eat of *every* tree in the garden except one. But the serpent asks, “Did God say you shall not eat of *any* tree in the garden?” **He's trying to give impression that God is stingy, selfish, and unwilling to share good things.**

- ❖ **The devil’s crafty lie is aimed at getting Eve to doubt the goodness of God.** He’s trying to portray God as harsh and restrictive, as a cosmic kill-joy. He wants to plant seeds of doubt in the woman’s mind, so that she starts questioning God’s motives and doubting the goodness of his commands – the goodness of his heart.
  - Listen to how the serpent responds after her initial attempt to correct him. Listen in v4, *“But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.”*” That’s a direct repudiation of what God said in chapter 2. God said if you eat of that tree, *“you shall surely die,”* but Satan said, *“You will not surely die.”* **His lie is aimed at getting Eve to disregard God’s warnings.** To believe that disobedience won’t result in judgment.
  
- ❖ **I find it interesting that the first doctrine to be denied in human history is the doctrine of divine judgment.** You will not surely die. God will not carry out his threats. That’s a very attractive lie. There’s something appealing in the idea that God, in the end, will always relent. He won’t send anyone to hell. He’s too loving for that. That’s appealing. **We all want to live in a world where our actions bear no consequences.** Where there is no final judgment.
  - But then, we quickly realize that we would only want that if it only applied to our own actions. It would actually be horrible if no one’s actions ever had consequences. It would be hell if everyone could just do what they wanted and get away with it. So it turns out that divine judgment is not as bad of a thing as we initially thought.
  
- ❖ But at this point in the story, the serpent’s crafty lies maintain a certain appeal for Eve. **He is getting her to distrust God’s wisdom, to doubt God’s goodness, to disregard God’s warnings, and to deny his words (what he actually said).** Eve is starting to wonder if God really has her best interest in mind and whether she needs to take matters into her own hands.

### **The Woman’s Creeping Doubt**

- ❖ That leads to our second point: the woman’s creeping doubt. You can see signs of that if you carefully analyze her response to the serpent in v2. **The woman tries to correct the serpent and defend God, but she makes the same error of exaggerating God’s words.** Listen to what she says in vv2-3, *“<sup>2</sup>And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*”
  
- ❖ Notice how, when quoting God, **she subtracted from his Word.** She leaves out the words *“surely”* and *“every”* (cf. 2:16). God said you may *surely* eat of *every* tree, meaning there is a lot of freedom and a lot of goodness available to his people. Yet there’s no emphasis on that in her response. Her view of God’s goodness is subtly beginning to change.
  - And then **she added to God’s Word.** She added, *“neither shall you touch it.”* Now God never said that. He only said you can’t eat of its fruit. That slight addition about touching reveals that she’s already accepted a harsher view of God.
    - And then **she softened God’s Word.** Notice how she said, *“lest you die.”* She left out *“surely”*. God said you shall *surely* die. But in her response, she softened the certainty of death as a consequence of disobedience.

- ❖ And notice the emphasis on the location of the tree “*in the midst of the garden*”. She probably thought its central location in the garden meant it was special. **It must be God’s best tree. But for some reason, he’s holding it back from me.** He’s holding back his best.
  - Do you see how the serpent has poisoned her mind with a venomous lie? With just one question, he got her to question if God really loves her – if he really has her best in mind. She used to think that. But she’s not so sure anymore. Doubt has crept in.
  
- ❖ **Friends, I would contend that we are more susceptible to these kinds of lies and temptations when we’re not being careful with God’s Word.** When we subtract from his Word, or try to add to it, or try to soften its harder edges. The less careful we are, the less precise we are, in our study and teaching of God’s Word, then the more susceptible we are to accepting minimized and modified views of God.
  - **Now I don’t want to be too hard on Eve.** She wasn’t there to hear God’s original command. It was up to Adam to pass along God’s Word. But apparently he wasn’t too careful. If you have the responsibility to teach others the Word – as a small group leader, discipler, parent, etc – pay careful attention to rightly handle God’s Word.
  
- ❖ And when Eve added to God’s Word – about not touching the tree – I think it’s fair to assume she had good intentions. **She was trying to set up guardrails to keep herself from disobeying.** She was probably thinking, “If God’s rule is don’t eat from the tree, then I’m not even going near it. I won’t even touch it.”
  - **But the problem is – if you’re not careful to prioritize God’s Word and to carefully study it – then that line between God’s rule and your rule gets easily blurred.** And eventually, in your mind, your rule becomes God’s rule. So for Eve, her personal rule of not touching the tree *became*, in her mind, God’s rule.
  
- ❖ **And that’s how legalism entered the world.** What is legalism if not the supplanting of God’s rules with man-made rules? God’s Word says to keep myself sexually pure? Then I’m not even going to date. God’s Word says to guard my thought life? Then I’m not going to watch any R-rate movies. That’s fine and well as a personal rule of life. To help you obey God’s Word. Those are good intentions.
  - **But legalism is the taking of that personal rule – blurring it with God’s rule – and now treating it with the same binding authority as the Word of God and now holding others to that standard.** Christians shouldn’t date. Christians don’t watch R-rated movies. That’s how you get legalism. It’s been around since the beginning. It stems from not carefully studying God’s Word. Not knowing it well enough to distinguish God-given authoritative rules from our personal, man-made ones.
  
- ❖ Friends, try to put yourself in Eve’s shoes. She’s developed a legalistic mindset and an over-exaggerated view of God’s strictness. **And the serpent’s lies are beginning to poison her view of God causing her to doubt his goodness and love.** Does that sound familiar? Sadly, that ancient lie continues to poison human hearts. Injecting a creeping doubt towards God.

- ❖ Now after sensing this doubt in Eve, the serpent strikes again. In v5, he says openly what she was probably already thinking. **That the reason God is holding back this tree is because he doesn't want to share the joy of being God.** Listen to v5, *“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*
  - The serpent is implying that God is trying to keep this knowledge from you because he's worried you might supplant him. He's afraid you might ascend too high above your station and take his place. That's why he's holding you back. That's why he's keeping from you the knowledge of good and evil.

### **The Tree's Central Significance**

- ❖ Now what's wrong with knowing good and evil? Why would God keep that from Adam and Eve? **Does he want them to live in ignorance of what's right and wrong?** That's a good question and leads us to our third point: the tree's central significance.
  - What does this tree of the knowledge of good and evil signify? What does it represent? **I'd say it's less about knowing the difference between good and evil and more about determining the difference.** You see, ancient readers would've understood the expression *“the knowledge of good and evil”* as referring to a particular type of knowledge that confers independence and autonomy.
- ❖ Later on in Scripture, in **Deuteronomy 1:39** prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses reminds the Israelites that the former generation died in the wilderness because they refused to trust God and enter the Promised Land first time around. But God had promised that your *“little ones ... your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.”*
  - Moses says children don't have this knowledge – this knowledge of good or evil. Now that doesn't mean they don't know right from wrong. **In this sense, it means they're not independent and autonomous from the decisions of their parents.** So it wasn't up to these children to refuse to enter the Promised Land, which is why they're not held responsible and why they get a second chance. So in saying they have no knowledge of good and evil, Moses is depicting them as utterly dependent.
- ❖ So then, to gain this knowledge is to gain a form of independence. **To possess the knowledge of good and evil is not about knowing right from wrong but about deciding for yourself what's right and wrong.** I like how Vaughan Roberts puts it in his book *God's Big Picture*. **He says Adam and Eve were not just guilty of law-breaking but of law-making.** They were trying to usurp God's authority. They were trying to “be like God”. They were trying to make their own laws and live independently of him.
- ❖ It's rather strange, if you think about it, that God would make the very first rule a prohibition not to eat of a tree. Why didn't he prohibit more obvious bad behavior? Why didn't he tell them, “You shall not hurt each other or lie or steal”? **The reason is because, if God had made the first rule, “You shall not lie or steal,” then he would've been teaching them that the essence of sin is bad behavior, doing bad things.**

- ❖ But instead he chose a tree and its fruit, which are good things. The first rule for mankind was to not eat a good thing and to trust that God has a good reason for it. **Because the essence of sin is not just doing bad things. The essence of sin is not trusting the goodness of God and the wisdom of God, and then taking it upon yourself to provide for your own good as if you were your own god.**
  - That flagrant streak of independence is at the heart of every sin we commit. Why do we lie? Because deep down we don't rest in how God views us. So we protect our sense of self by twisting the truth to make us appear better than we truly are. Why do we steal? Because deep down we don't trust in God's good provision of our daily bread. So we literally take it upon ourselves at the expense of others.
- ❖ **All sin is rooted in distrust and expressed by defiance.** And we have no one to blame for our sins but ourselves. It's not because of others. It's not because of our circumstances. Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect circumstances and lived with perfect people, and yet they still fell into sin. Because the problem, fundamentally, is not external to us – but here in our hearts.

### The Couple's Costly Choice

- ❖ Which explains the first couple's costly choice. This brings us to our fourth point. Let's turn back to the text in v6. *“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”*
- ❖ Notice how the narrator says the woman *“saw that the tree was good.”* That’s similar language to what God did at the end of each day of creation back in chapter 1. He saw that it was good. So that’s God’s job. He has the authority to determine what is good. But, again, that’s what sin is. **Sin is rebellion. It’s a throwing off of God’s rule while attempting to do his job.** To rule your own life.
  - That’s what Eve wanted. And that’s what Adam wanted. He was there with her, and he fell into rebellion alongside her. **They both sought to be like God. But the tragic irony is that they already were like him.** They were made in his image. And yet, they were not content with God’s good provision but sought to independently provide for themselves. They sinned.
- ❖ And the bottom fell out. **Suddenly, they were alienated from creation; alienated from each other; and alienated from God.** The first couple’s choice to rebel was a costly one. Sin's corrupting effects reverberated throughout creation, and now creation groans for redemption and renewal (Rom 8:21-22). Genesis 3 explains why we’ve had natural disasters devastating civilizations way before humans began contributing to climate change.
  - Their corrupting effects of sin also ruined human fellowship. Chapter 4 begins by recording history’s first murder and ends with more killing. And in chapter 5, we have a genealogy that goes from Adam to Noah, and the one key phrase that keeps popping up is, *“and he died . . . and he died . . . and he died.”* God’s warning came true. **From Genesis 3 onward, sin, death, and the devil began their ugly reign over humanity.**

- ❖ Friends, if you need an explanation for why people hurt each other, then look no further than Genesis 3. And if you want an explanation for why you bear a crippling weight of guilt and shame – for why you have that nagging feeling that you're alone even when surrounded by friends or that you're a failure even though you have so many achievements – then look no further than Genesis 3. **Sin has alienated us from God.** Like the first couple, we've been cast out of his presence. All of us were born in exile. Cut off from our true home and country. We know this to be true. We can't escape the feelings of solitude and shame.

### The Couple's Cheap Covering

- ❖ That leads us to our final point: the couple's cheap covering. **Adam and Eve try to atone for their own sins.** But their efforts are pathetic and simply won't do. Listen to v7, *“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”*
  - What's interesting is that the Hebrew word (*erom*) for naked here is different from what we saw in chapter 2:25. The only other instance of this word in the Pentateuch, besides Genesis 3, is in **Deuteronomy 28:48**. In that verse, nakedness describes the state of those under God's judgment for not trusting and obeying. This subtle shift in terms signals that the couple didn't just come to know intellectually that they were naked. **They came to know morally that they were under God's judgment.**
- ❖ That's why they felt so ashamed and tried to cover up their nakedness. **What was previously a sign of openness and intimacy between the couple is now a sign of shame and scandal.** So they tried to cover themselves. They tried to self-atone.
  - Scripture says they took fig leaves, which are the largest leaves of any tree that grow in the Middle East. So they were sufficiently large enough to serve as makeshift clothes to cover up their private parts. **But while they were successful in hiding their outer shame – you couldn't see their nakedness anymore – their inner shame remained exposed before God.** Those leaves were sufficient to cover their body parts but insufficient to cover their sin. So they hid.
    - Listen to v8, *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”*
- ❖ **So they tried to hide from an all-seeing, all-knowing, all-present God.** Needless to say, it wasn't their best moment. Now if this was your first time reading Genesis 3, you would naturally assume that Adam and Eve will surely die. That's what God warned.
  - But they don't suddenly keel over. They don't immediately die. Instead, we're told, in Genesis 5, that Adam went on living until he was 930 years old. **Instead, we read that, by the end of Genesis 3, God has made the couple garments of skins and clothed them.** The LORD covered up their nakedness. He covered up their shame.
    - But not with more fig leaves. Not with larger or more durable leaves. But with skins – animal skins. But that means something had to die. **Some animal had to be killed, so that Adam and Eve could be clothed.**

- ❖ **As we've seen, Genesis 3 answers the existential question, "What's the problem?" And interestingly enough, it also ends with a hint of the biblical narrative's solution.** Genesis 3 ends with a substitutionary sacrifice. Blood is shed. A death surely occurs. Sin is atoned. Shame is covered. And the people of God are saved from judgment and granted new life.
  
- ❖ Friends, this is a glimpse of the gospel. A glimmer of the good news. Like that early glow in the night sky right before the dawn. **Because as the story of Scripture unfolds, the morning sun eventually does rise when the Son of God took on flesh.** He went on to live the life we were created to live. And on the cross, he died the death we deserve to die. He served as the substitutionary sacrifice who covers over our sin – for good.
  
- ❖ **God agrees with sinners that their sin and shame need to be covered.** Adam and Eve's impulse to cover up was not bad in itself. **But the question is, "Who will do it?"** If we try it ourselves – if we try to cover our sin and shame with good works, with religious devotion, with tears of remorse; if we rely on these cheap coverings – then God won't cover it. Our sin and shame will remain. And one day, we'll be exposed and condemned.
  - But if we confess our sins now and stop our feeble attempts to cover up, then God, in his kindness and mercy, promises to cover over our sin and shame with the blood and righteousness of Christ, which will fully and finally shield us forever.
    - So it's time to come out of hiding, friends. Come to Jesus and receive his mercy. Let him cover over your sin and shame. He can surely do it.