

ECF 27th August 2017 Genesis 3:20-24 Punishment & Hope

As many of you know, Lorna's dad before he retired was a policeman. I think that is the reason why her family all love watching crime dramas. But of course they are not alone in that. Anyone else like watching that kind of TV? There are hundreds of them on TV. Many of us love to watch those who are guilty get what they deserve.

One of the longest running American TV series is Law & Order. It ran from 1990, right through until 2010. And it was so popular that it spawned four spin-off series in the US and one in the UK.

The thing that set this TV series apart from other crime dramas was that it had a two part approach: It followed both the New York City police as they investigated the crime and also the District Attorney's office as they prosecuted that crime.

In many ways, I think that they stole this idea from Genesis 3. As we've gone through this chapter we have:

- First of all seen Adam and Eve succumbing to the temptation to reach beyond their God-given role and commit the crime of sinning against God.
- Then we saw God investigating this crime, searching out and interrogating the suspects, although of course he knew all along their guilt.
- Then last time, we looked at how God found them guilty and sentenced them to experience the consequences of their sin!
- And in many ways our passage this morning is like the final scene of this narrative as the two guilty people are led away to start their jail sentence.

But there is a huge difference here compared to TV shows like Law & Order. Even although God took the role of investigating and prosecuting this crime, throughout it all, God showed his amazing grace. And we can see that here at the end of this chapter, as although it deals with punishing the guilty, there is also amazing hope of salvation.

Genesis 3:20-24: "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

²¹The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²²And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever." ²³So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."

1. A Life-Giving Calling

Eve had stood before God as he pronounced his judgement on her. "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children." Genesis 3:16 Because of her rebellion and sin against God, her life would forever be impacted and disrupted by pain and suffering.

But even although she was guilty, even although she had acted directly against God's commands, amazingly God had not fully given up on her. She would still have the joy of fulfilling her God-given role as the mother of the human race.

And Adam seemingly understood this and so: "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living." Genesis 3:20 Even although she played her part in bringing so much disaster and death into this world, she would be called Eve, or Life, because she would be used by God to bring life into this world.

a) God's Purposes Will Be Fulfilled

It is a powerful illustration that no matter what happens, God's purposes will be fulfilled. Sin had invaded God's world. It had messed up and distorted the beauty and majesty of what God had created. But sin and death and the Devil would not stop God's purpose in this world!

Proverbs 19:21 states: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

And so Paul said that God's eternal purpose was that "through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known." Ephesians 3:10 God's plan was always to build his church, to form a people for himself who would reveal and declare his power, majesty, love and grace. And no matter what happened, no matter what anybody did, this would become a reality!

And that should give us so much hope today. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Matthew 16:18

Satan and his forces of evil are savage in their attacks. This world continues to rebel against God and his will. People repeatedly choose to go their own way instead of God's. But Jesus will build his church and God will be glorified and nothing and no-one can stop it from happening!

b) God Uses Broken People

But this verse also shows that God is willing to accomplish his purposes through broken people, as Eve [“would become the mother of all the living.”](#) Genesis 3:20.

Eve had messed up. She broken God's law. She had turned away from his plan. But God had not discarded her. In his outrageous grace, he was still going to use this woman to fulfil his purpose in this world.

He didn't need to. He is the Sovereign Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. He could have started again. He could have formed from the dust another family to work through. But he didn't. Instead he took this woman, broken and stained by sin, and worked through her to accomplish his purpose.

And right throughout the Bible, we see God doing the same with people like lying Abraham, laughing Sarah, cheating Jacob, proud Joseph, murdering Moses, adulterous David, denying Peter, persecuting Paul and the list goes on and on. Again and again God takes people who have made mistakes, chosen the wrong path, rebelled against his plan, who are broken, tainted and messed up – and he works through them to accomplish his perfect plan.

This doesn't mean that we can sin and it doesn't matter. Eve and millions of others would suffer as the consequence of her sin. But it does mean, that if we are here today as people who are broken, who have messed up, who have made bad choices – then we can rejoice that God still is willing to work through us.

In fact that is why Jesus came. [“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”](#) 1 Timothy 1:15 Jesus came for broken people, to bring his saving grace and healing power so that we could enter into life in all its fullness and be used by God to bring life to a lost and dying world.

2. A Sin-Hiding Covering

God was still going to work through Adam and Eve, but they had a problem that needed to be dealt with. When they sinned, their eyes were opened and they realised their physical and spiritual nakedness. So [“they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”](#) Genesis 3:7

As we saw a few weeks ago, this was a desperate attempt to hide from God and from each other what they had become. But they couldn't cover their sin with their home-made clothes. It still separated them from God and from each other.

It is a lesson to us, that no matter how much we try, we cannot hide our sin from God. No amount of religious activity, good works, pious pretence, ritual or ceremony or any other Do It Yourself righteousness can cover up our sin before a holy God!

Our only hope is, [“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”](#) 1 John 1:9

a) A Practical Solution

This was the ultimate solution that Adam and Eve needed, but in his grace God reached out to them and: [“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”](#) Genesis 3:21

But this was much more than just a pragmatic solution to their nakedness. This was a powerful statement of who they had become.

Adam & Eve's home-made clothes were a sinful attempt to conceal who they were. But these God-made clothes would confess who they had become. They would remind them that they had to cover up because they were not who they had been designed by God to be.

This is why God tells us to wear clothes, and to [“dress modestly, with decency and propriety.”](#) 1 Timothy 2:9. It shows our acceptance of the fact that we have fallen short of the glory of God's original design for humanity. Our clothes show our acceptance of the fact that we are fallen and sinful, that we're not what we should be.

b) A Picture of Salvation

But these animals skins were more than just a reminder of their sin. They were also a promise that God would one day

provide clothes that would finally and fully cover sin. Isaiah wrote about this in Isaiah 61:10

"I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

So what are we wearing this morning? If like Adam and Eve, we come here dressed in our own attempt of self-righteousness then we will fail pitifully. But if we have accepted the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness that God alone can provide, then we can stand in his holy presence, delight in his love and rejoice in his goodness!

c) A Promise of a Substitute

But these garments of skin are more than a picture of God's gift of salvation. They are also a promise of a substitute.

These clothes were expensive to provide because an animal had to be killed. Blood had to be shed. To cover Adam and Eve's nakedness, an innocent substitute had to die.

God would repeat this lesson again and again to his people through the sacrificial system at the tabernacle and the temple. But none of these could finally or fully cover our sin: "because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Hebrews 10:4

But these clothes for Adam and Eve, and all those animal sacrifices were pointing forward to the ultimate substitute for sin when "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21 Jesus alone was sinless and holy. And yet, on the cross, he willingly took our place. He accepted our sin. He suffered our punishment. He died our death.

And so if we put our faith in Christ and accept what he accomplished on the cross for us, then will be totally forgiven, completely set free, declared right with God for all eternity and clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.

This is what it means to be properly dressed this morning! It is to be clothed with Christ, because

"He was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed." Isaiah 53:5

3. A Serious Cost

But Adam and Eve didn't experience this. They stood guilty before God. And so "The Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken." Genesis 3:23

a) Barred from the Garden

The serpent had claimed that God had lied when he said about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "When you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:17. And of course Adam and Eve didn't die physically that day. They went on to live on the earth for many more years.

But Jesus said that "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." John 17:3 And so on the day that Adam & Eve ate from that tree, they did die. They were separated from God. Barred from his intimate presence. Unable to commune with him in the garden as before.

And it is this spiritual death that outside of Christ, we all share. "You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world." Ephesians 2:1-2

But even as God barred them from the garden, he was acting in love. They had to be kept away, because "He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever." Genesis 3:22

If Adam and Eve had been allowed to stay in the garden, they would have eaten from the tree of life, and they would have avoided physical death. But they would have lived forever in spiritual death.

And this would mean that Jesus could not come to die to deliver us from sin. There would have been no hope for humanity. No way of salvation. No way back to God. In driving Adam and Eve out of paradise, God was acting in mercy and grace!

b) Brought Near to God

And this is implied in the details of what happened here. [“He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”](#) Genesis 3:24

This cherubim and flaming sword barred the way to the tree of life, but they also pointed forward to God’s plan of salvation.

They were placed on the east side of the garden, because presumably this was the entrance. For Moses and his original readers, this would have been deeply significant as God had ordered that the tabernacle, the place of meeting with God was also to be entered from the east.

And inside the tabernacle was an ornate lampstand of gold, which was structured like a tree, with branches, flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms. It provided light for the priest as they served but it probably also was symbolic of the tree of life.

And instead of a flaming sword flashing back and forth, the first piece of furniture of the tabernacle was the altar of burnt offering, where fire, that symbol of God’s judgement, would burn up the animal sacrifices, providing forgiveness and reconciliation for God’s people.

And instead of barring the entrance, cherubim adorned the walls of the tabernacle, and a pair of solid gold cherubim were placed on the ark of the covenant, which was the symbol of God’s presence and the place he met with his people.

And so even as God barred his disobedient children from the garden, he was pointing forward to his provision of a place where mankind could again approach him.

But we know that the tabernacle, and later on the temple, was only a place of restricted access. The people could only come into the courtyard. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place, and only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, once a year with a sacrifice. The tabernacle and temple began to restore what Adam’s sin destroyed – but these were only a shadow of what was to come.

It was only when Jesus died on the cross, that the way was fully opened up again. When Jesus died, [“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”](#) Matthew 27:51 which declared that our sin was paid for in full, and the way to God’s intimate presence was now open.

And so, today if we have faith in Jesus, then we are no longer barred from God’s presence by cherubim or sword. We don’t need to keep away in fear and shame. Instead, [“We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.”](#) Hebrews 10:19–20

And we can look forward to the day when Jesus will come back for us and take us to be with him forever in his Father’s house, where he promises: [“I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”](#) Revelation 2:7

Conclusion

Yes, God applied the law to Adam and Eve and ordered them out of the garden. But God’s eternal plan was always to provide a way back:

- So that broken people could experience life in all its fullness.
- So that sinful people could be clothed in perfect righteousness.
- So that guilty people could be welcomed back into fellowship with himself.

This is the hope that Jesus offers to all who put their trust in him!

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August 27th 2017