

Gen. 3:14-24 (reading from v. 8)

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." ¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And 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 forever." ²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to

work the ground from which he had been taken.²⁴ After 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This past May, NBC announced that it would be cancelling the show “Law and Order” after an incredible 20 seasons. The show has 2 spin-offs that continue, and has influenced many other crime shows such as CSI. Given Law and Order’s success, I find it interesting to think about the show’s basic plot, which was exactly the same for every single show. The opening scene is always someone coming upon the evidence of a crime, usually a body. Then the focus shifts to the police, who figure things out rapidly and arrest someone. Then comes the trial, and the show ends with a verdict. Though in real life this process takes years assuming a case is solved, here the viewer experiences justice in a neat and tidy fashion, in less than an hour.

I think that is a major factor in the popularity of shows like “Law and Order.” We live in a world that can be extremely frightening and precarious. These can be uncertain and fearful times, whether in our cities or in our personal situations. Watching a show that is based on real details, but is compact and predictable, can bring a sense of control or even peace to some viewers. Even if it’s just for an hour, the scary world outside seems manageable and a little less threatening. But we all know that even “reality” TV isn’t reality, because life isn’t staged, and it isn’t simple. We know that God is in control, but life can still be messy and complicated.

When we think about the events in Genesis 3, on the surface it seems to be a simple account that is fairly cut-and-dry, at least on the surface. But the implications of these events are so far-reaching that they still touch us today, and will always touch humanity. I expect that in heaven we will remember the events of our lives, even the ones that we might prefer to forget. This is not to dampen our experience of glory, but because the Lord will equip us to look back and see His hand at work in us and among us, much like the “Footprints” poem many of you know. When we see one set of footprints in the sand, we will praise Him for carrying us through the toughest times of our lives.

Today's Scripture features the Lord explaining the effects that Adam and Eve's sin will have, both for them and their offspring. But the Lord starts by dealing with the serpent. Remember that God is addressing the snake as a symbol of Satan. Ever since then, the snake has represented struggle and death. It is an extremely unclean animal in later Jewish law, and its position of crawling in dirt shows its humiliation as a creature. The phrase in verse 14 about the serpent eating dust has exactly the same sense as when we hear someone say, "Eat my dust!" The one who eats dust is put down, rejected, and left behind.

When the Lord turns to Eve to talk with her about her sinful failure, it sounds from the English as though she would have had pain in childbirth regardless. But based on the Hebrew it's better to say that the pain a woman experiences in birth will be abundant. While modern medicine has helped reduce this pain, there remains a real risk of death for both mother and child in this momentous process. Even when women are not bearing children, there is still physical pain and discomfort involved in simply being women; all of this is traced to God's comments to Eve.

What's important to note is that all of the pain associated with giving birth is coupled with the tremendous joy that comes when a new child is delivered into the world. One effect of Adam and Eve's sin is that our greatest happiness and joy is nearly always blended with some tinge of loss or sadness, even if it's simply because the joy cannot last. Just as with childbearing, to gain anything worthwhile we must sacrifice. As you know, parents sacrifice tremendously to love and provide for their children. But the idea goes far beyond that. Anything we do requires hard work and sacrifice, and usually the greater the prize, the more the sacrifice that's required. This is not how it originally was in the garden of Eden.

Last week I touched on the reality that sin has driven a wedge between us and God, between us as people, and between us and other creatures. God's statement in verse 16 is one of the most profound descriptions of human relations in the Scriptures, and if we don't pay attention we can skip right past it. The Lord says to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." What we need to do is look at these words closely, because in some respects they don't seem to indicate a curse. Between the lines,

though, we find the root of many of the problems all of us encounter as we relate to one another.

First, God tells Eve that her desire will be for her husband. We might think that's a good thing, in the sense that she will be faithful to him in a marriage context. What this actually refers to is a distortion in human relations. Remember that Eve was created to be Adam's helpmate, an equally valuable counterpart in their worship and work together. Their bond was to be filled with mutual love and respect. God tells Eve that because of sin, Eve and women in general will be tempted to rule over their husbands. Sin has introduced friction, and the woman who controls or henpecks her husband shows evidence of the Lord's words to Eve. Even the Proverbs note that a quarrelsome, nagging wife is like a dripping faucet. Not only is she annoying, but she pelts away at her husband instead of encouraging and helping him. This isn't what God intended.

The rest of verse 16 tells the flip side. God says that Adam and men generally will rule over Eve and other women. Rather than being the loving provider and protector, man will be tempted to dominate the woman, exploit her, and take advantage of her. He will use his physical strength not for her benefit, but to abuse her. And she may not have the fortitude to stand up to him. But the man is not to be the Lord, since we have only one Lord. Abusive husbands are not what God intended.

What it all boils down to is this: apart from God's design, marriage is complicated, male and female relations are complicated, and general human relations are complicated. This is not news to any of you, but it's important to see its truth here in Genesis 3. Whether in marriages or friendships or bonds within the church, the Holy Spirit is working in us to undo these effects. Rather than trying to control or manipulate one another, Christians are to be humble servants, as Christ is. 1 Peter tells Christians not to lord it over one another, but be good examples of godliness for others. Rather than blaming one another as Adam and Eve did, Christians prayerfully work together to face challenges and solve problems creatively. The world is harsh and cutthroat, often with a win-at-all-costs attitude. But that is not what God intended.

After God explains the impact of her sin to Eve, He turns to Adam. Adam was the one who received God's Word directly, and who bore responsibility to care for his wife. Even though Eve took the fruit first, in the Scriptures Adam bears ultimate responsibility

for their sin because he failed to heed and obey God's directions. As a result, the pleasant work Adam would have done in a lush garden was to be distorted into sweaty toil with land that would now grow thorns and thistles, or what we today call weeds. But by far the most severe repercussion was that Adam and all of his descendents would unavoidably face death. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we all return to dust. This is definitely not what God intended. But it is what God permitted, and we know that He works all things for good for those who love Him.

Now as we read this, we may think that this is about as bad as it could possibly get. Instead of pain-free birth, women shed blood and tears for the sake of life. Instead of pain-free work, men sweat and ache to provide for their families. And all of our hearts will one day beat one last time. Yet these are not the worst effects of sin. The worst is the spiritual separation from God that we experience. Adam and Eve once lived with God, in His very presence, so only they really know how drastic a change it was to be cast out of God's garden. But because of their sin, they simply could not stay. God's holiness demands that only the righteous stand before Him, and they no longer qualified. The spiritual effects of this first sin were in fact so horrific that it took God Himself to rescue us, and bring the hope of restoration.

As I was preparing this sermon, I came across a comment about Adam and Eve being cast from Eden that I had not thought of before. The idea was that when God expelled them, He was not only exercising His holiness and justice, but also His great mercy. Remember that the couple ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now suppose that they had then eaten the fruit of the other sacred tree, the tree of life. They would have lived forever in their sinful, distorted state with no possibility of being redeemed. They would have been like Satan and his demons, who have no hope of salvation. So it was only in being disciplined by the Lord that Adam and Eve had the hope of being eventually restored to His presence once again.

And they did, in fact, have this hope. The first proof of this lies in the fact that Adam calls her "Eve," meaning "life." He has the foresight to know that she will bear offspring through God's blessing. Their sin is horrific, but it is not the final word.

But they had an even greater reason for hope, and it lies in verse 15. This verse is so important that scholars since the second century have called it the "Protoevangelium," the

First Gospel. In that verse, God says to Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” The Lord foretells of an enduring struggle between Satan and humanity. Later in Scripture we see that some humans end up taking Satan’s side in this war while others are faithful to the Lord. Nearly the entire Old Testament is an account of how a faithful remnant struggle against evil, whether that evil was manifest through pagan nations or through Israelites who rebelled against the Lord.

As you know, the struggle continues to this day. Christ’s Church is His bride, and Jesus nurtures us to fulfill the responsibility that Adam failed to live up to with Eve. Through the Spirit Jesus strengthens us to grow spiritually, despite the sin we struggle against. Ultimately, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. This is why in Ephesians 6 we are commanded to put on the full spiritual armor of God so that we can firmly take our stand against the devil’s schemes.

But the reason Adam had hope, and the reason we have hope, is that this struggle will not last forever. God is in charge, and verse 15 tells how the story will end. The son of the woman will crush the serpent’s head, despite being wounded Himself in the process. The language here is of a final, absolute victory that cannot be undone, and that is how Christ fulfilled this prophecy. Even from the moment of the first sin, God offers the certain promise of human salvation through a redeemer, and the ultimate defeat of the devil. This is the “First Gospel,” and we are blessed to see its fulfillment in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we also look forward with hope to the Gospel’s supreme fulfillment. Revelation 2:7 hints at this: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” The paradise we will enjoy for eternity with the Lord will actually be better than Eden, and there will be no risk of losing its perfection. When Adam and Eve were expelled, God placed cherubim and flames at Eden’s gate to keep them away from His holy presence. Jesus has purchased our access back into God’s presence, and we don’t need to fear flaming swords or

foreboding, mysterious creatures. In fact, we already have access to God's throneroom through prayer, but one day, the faith will become sight.

So what happens in the meantime? In verse 21, God made garments of skin for Adam and Eve. Again, this may seem at first like a mundane sentence, but it is rich with significance. Throughout the Scriptures there is a principle that God has instituted in His wisdom: in our fallen world, blessings come through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. The blessing of children comes through the shedding of blood. Here, for Adam and Eve the blessing of protection and warmth comes through the shedding of an animal's blood. Later in the Old Testament, the blessing of a sacrifice that pleases the Lord comes through the shedding of an animal's blood. And ultimately, the blessing of eternal forgiveness and salvation comes through the Lamb of God shedding His blood in our place. All of that symbolism begins here, when God provides clothing for His sinful creatures.

God continues to provide for us sinners, day in and day out. Because of Jesus, we have been clothed not with animal skins, but clothed with pure robes of righteousness. For now, we carry the treasure of the Gospel as jars of clay. This is the treasure we have to share with our neighbors and co-workers and friends. This is why we have VBS, and why we are having outreach events. This is why the Lord needs us to serve as His ambassadors in Carteret. There are people He loves here who have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That Gospel reaches all the way back to Genesis 3, and all the way to us today. When we reach out, the treasure of the Gospel is what we hold in our hands to offer the world. Let us share that treasure eagerly, joyfully, and generously with everyone we meet.