

Confession, Consequences, Grace, Genesis 3:8-24

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Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. This summer we are walking through the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis in a series subtitled, Creating Culture. The image that represents this series was actually produced by our very own Jason Crigler. The story behind it goes like this:

I made this print for my wife on her birthday a few years ago. Kari has long been intrigued by the rings of a tree and the story they tell. The lines, representing years of drought or plenty, are unique to each tree, and play a part in the beauty of the overall image.

So, why this artwork for this sermon series? Well, as God creates culture for his world, he works with a canvas that is both beautiful and broken—just like the image of the tree rings. So as God defines culture for the next ten years of Antioch, we want to embrace the soulful reality that woven into all of life is both the beauty of God's original creation and its brokenness because of sin. And in this way we can be a people whose heads are lifted to the glory of God, whose hands are finding him in our everyday lives, and whose hearts are stayed on the hope of him making all things new.

Today we'll be learning from Genesis 3:8-24 if you'd like to open your Bible with me. You can find that on page 3 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. After today we will have had two sermons about the creation of humanity and two sermons about the sin of humanity. These are *such important* parts of the Bible, which explains why these four sermons have been longer than usual, and also why I would encourage you to go back and listen to any that you've missed in the midst of summer travels.

The title of today's sermon is: "Confession, Consequences, Grace," and the main idea goes like this: Because humanity departed from God and was laid in the dust of death, Jesus Christ was laid in the dust of death and returned to life. If you're like, 'That's pretty much what you said last Sunday'—you're right, and hey, you're starting to catch on. Here's the road map for today's sermon:

- 1) God Draws Out What We've Done - vv. 8-13
- 2) God Gives Out What We Deserve - vv. 14-19
- 3) God Holds Out What We Desire - vv. 20-24

Since today's passage is so long, and we'll be walking through it one verse at a time, I'm not going to ask you to stand. Instead, I ask you to posture your heart to receive the preaching of God's word, even if it goes a bit longer than usual. And yet still we offer this blessing:

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God's people said, *Amen*.

Exposition

One of the coolest things I've ever done in my life was hike into the foothills of the Himalayas and spend a week teaching and learning from Nepali pastors from the surrounding countryside. One of the *least* coolest things I've ever done in my life was make my way out of the foothills of the Himalayas and back into the capital city of Kathmandu. You see I was the team leader, and since we were riding out of the mountains in a Jeep instead of hiking, I thought it would be a good idea to give my beloved team medicine to prevent motion sickness. Unfortunately, I only had the drowsy kind. Since I don't have problems with motion sickness, I didn't take any medicine, and so I got to watch as everyone on the team fell into their medicated slumber. Not a big deal, right? Except when all eight of you are crammed into a four-seater Jeep going down some of the worst, most dangerous "roads" in the world. People were slamming their heads over and over against everything—metal bars, glass windows, each other. I literally thought I had killed them all. To make matters worse, it was in the middle of a blazing hot dry season on roads made up of dust as fine as baby powder. So not only did they all have concussions, they were also now being *covered* in layer upon layer of dust. And all this went on for about ten hours—that is, until one of our wheels detached from the axle altogether. No doubt about it, we had gone from paradise gained to paradise lost.¹

You may not have had a Nepali road experience, but I'm sure you could relate with your own paradise lost story of some kind. Where does this come from? Well, over the past couple weeks of our journey in Genesis we have watched humanity go from the heights

¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), Kindle Edition, Loc 1583-1588

of a garden paradise saturated with God's presence, to the beginnings of a death march out of that paradise forever.

Although created and provisioned with everything they needed to (1) love God and (2) keep his commands and (3) not find them burdensome,² the man and woman (1) *did* find them burdensome and (2) missed the mark of God's good purpose and (3) chose to depart from him. Although formed and risen up with the breath of life from the dust of the earth, we will continue watching in horror as they are undone and laid right back in the dust—and rightly so, because *their* story is *our* story.

Where last week's passage cautioned us about the dangers of temptation, this week's passage shows us the consequences of giving in to temptation. For God's Old Testament people to whom Genesis was written, this would have certainly taught them where sin comes from, and warned them against indulging it. But more importantly, it would've put their God on display, not only as Creator and Provider, but also as the compassionate Judge of sinners.³

1) God Draws Out What We've Done - vv. 8-13

So, let's see how this plays out in the first section of the passage, which shows that God draws out what we've done. We read in verse 8 that after they had sewed fig leaves together to hide their nakedness from one another,

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. Genesis 3:8

First of all, we should take note that this is a different kind of hiding altogether. It's not just a matter of hiding certain parts from one another, but the man and woman want to hide *all of themselves* from their Creator God.⁴ Why? Well, whereas you and I only see one another in part from the outside, God sees all of us, inside and out. So before God even asks them what happened, it's clear that he already knows, and part of them, deep down, *knows that he knows*. The Bible will explain later, in fact, that "no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."⁵

² 1 John 5:3

³ Ross, Loc 1743-1745, 1596-1599

⁴ Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 91

⁵ Hebrews 4:13

So, what's out-of-place in this scene isn't the sudden presence of the Lord, it's the man and his wife terrified and hiding. The most significant thing we've learned about the garden thus far is that it was the place where God dwelled with his people. Throughout the rest of the Bible one of the most common terms for having a relationship with God is "walking with God".⁶ So what's on display is God's desire to be with his people always, and that he was there even when they turned away, just like the moments when you and I give in to temptation and selfish desire and turn away from our God.⁷

The significance, then, of God drawing near to them is that he's coming to intentionally *draw them out*. As one of the songs we often sing says, "If you had not loved me first / I would refuse you still".⁸ This is what allows our mission statement as a church to begin with "We pursue"—we pursue only because we have first *been pursued* by God. Otherwise, like the man and woman, we would still be hiding in fear of God our Judge, which is so clear as God speaks first with the man in verse 9:

⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Genesis 3:9-10

So not only is there suddenly this overwhelming shame, this prideful self-image that they can't live up to, now there's a paralyzing fear. Fear is a deep-seated emotion that shows we sense danger and pain, and that we therefore need to protect ourselves. That's why we always respond to fear by trying to gain control—whether by fight or flight. And yet, with only one fatherly question that's both firm and gentle, God draws out the exact source of the man's fear: he is now afraid of God's presence, the exposure of his sin, and the inevitable consequences. This means he is also experiencing guilt, which is a deep sense of responsibility for doing something wrong. And thus begins the trinity of broken emotions that infect the whole world, from the inner human experience all the way to the nature of entire cultures: fear, guilt, and shame.

But God doesn't just leave us to them. He leads us to what we call confession. And although confession is never fun, it's a necessary first step in God bringing us back to himself. It's why we include it in the liturgy of every single Sunday Gathering, and why

⁶ Genesis 5:24, 6:8-9; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 23:15; 2 Samuel 7:6-7; Micah 6:8; John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 2:10; 1 John 1:6-7, 2:6

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 154-155

⁸ Jordan Kauflin, "All I Have Is Christ," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0vfz5lr37g>

it's positioned early in the gathering—otherwise how are we to receive the word if we don't first recognize our need for it!

Here, we get to see God the master counselor doing this by asking specific questions that get right to the heart of the issue:

¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" [Although the man will keep trying to turn the focus toward others, God's eyes remain on *him*—"Did you obey or disobey?"⁹] *¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."* Genesis 3:11-12

The truth *finally* comes out, but it's all wrapped up in excuses. And so the new human posture toward sin is already clear: internally, we will feel it's effects on our conscience and thus try to hide it; externally, when someone calls us on it we will justify it by blaming others.

And just like the man, the "others" we blame fall into two categories: either people or God. It's clear enough in verse 12 that the man blames the woman—"she gave me fruit of the tree". But notice that he does it in a way that actually blames *God*—it's not just the woman, but "the woman *whom you gave to be with me*". In other words, 'God, if you hadn't given me this terrible wife, then I wouldn't have done anything wrong.'

Probably the more common way we hear ourselves blaming God today is by blaming our circumstances or fate in life:

- 'If I just had a spouse, then I wouldn't struggle like this.'
- 'If my kids would listen the first time, then I wouldn't get so upset.'
- 'If my husband would just change, then I wouldn't try to control him.'

When we blame our circumstances, even if there is some measure of truth in it, we're still blaming the One we think is behind our circumstances.¹⁰ Just look at how this plays out in the woman's confession in verse 13:

¹³ 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." Genesis 3:13

⁹ Ross, Loc 1648-1653

¹⁰ Ross, Loc 1653-1656; Wenham, 156

In other words, ‘Look at my circumstances—I was deceived by the serpent.’ No blaming God or the man, right? Well...think about what’s behind the circumstances. Who created the serpent? *God*. Who named him? *Man*. There it is again: ‘It’s not my fault—it’s *their* fault—it’s *your* fault!’¹¹

And what’s the result of all this? It’s the unavoidable effects of sin, which are just as evident today as they were in the beginning—*it breaks down relationships*:

- Human to God
- And then human to human
- And even human to creation¹²

What we learn from all this is how necessary, and even miraculous, it is for God to pursue us and draw out what we’ve done.

2) God Gives Out What We Deserve - vv. 14-19

And he does this so that he might then give out what we deserve, which leads into the second part of today’s passage. A few words of clarification about this section, which is often referred to as curses:

First, they aren’t commands or ideals to be followed, but more declarations of how life now will be. They’re what you get when you depart from God.

And second, they aren’t just curses. In fact, neither the man or the woman are “cursed” by God at all, only the serpent and the soil.¹³ They’re more like consequences from a just God, and if you look closely, woven into them are hopeful signs of a deeper purpose.¹⁴

So, let’s read them together, starting in verse 14:

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,

¹¹ Ross, Loc 1657-1658

¹² Wenham, 157

¹³ Wenham, 162

¹⁴ Ross, Loc 1660-1664; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1967), 78

*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 3:14*

According to the height that the serpent had risen in pride, that is the depth to which he must now be humiliated—on his belly and into the dust. And yes, you can see the results of this in a snake today, and it's meant to remind you of the fall like a rainbow reminds you of the flood. But there's more happening here. A curse is the opposite of a blessing; instead of invoking God's favor it brings God's judgment. And notice, there's no drawing out a confession from the serpent. There's no movement toward reconciliation. In fact, we are beginning to see there's more going on here than just a snake gone bad, especially in verse 15, which famously says this,¹⁵

*¹⁵ 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.” Genesis 3:15*

Within 150 years of Jesus' time on earth, there is record of Christian theologians viewing this verse as the first mention of the good news of salvation in the Bible. And it was probably even earlier than that, as we're told that Jesus himself on the road to Emmaus, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets...interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”¹⁶ He very likely blew his disciples minds by showing them that the offspring of the serpent—the powers of darkness and evil—would ultimately be crushed by the offspring of the woman—the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Amen!

But if this is the only place where you see Genesis 1-3 pointing to Jesus, man, I don't know if you've been listening very closely during this sermon series. He's everywhere!

Plus, to the original readers of Genesis, they didn't know the rest of the story. To them, Genesis 3:15 probably just communicated the origin of the greater battle playing out around them, the battle between good and evil, between humanity and sin. And so for them, the rest of Genesis basically unpacked 3:15 with examples, beginning with Cain, the first offspring of the woman, who murders his own brother. So put yourself in the

¹⁵ Ross, Loc 1664-1672; Wenham, 158; Kidner, 75

¹⁶ Luke 24:27

shoes of the original readers: you've got the promise of Genesis 3:15 in mind, so you're looking for the serpent-crusher; but character and after character falls short. Where does that leave you? Well, where it should leave you is longing and waiting for the promised one as you do battle with the evil one—which is a good posture for an Old Testament believer to have; *and* which is a posture not so different from New Testament believers, who are awaiting the promised second-coming of the serpent-crusher, Jesus Christ.¹⁷

God then turns to the woman in verse 16 and says,

*“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children. Genesis 3:16a*

Only one verse, but it says a lot. We need to keep in mind here the good intentions God had for the woman according to chapters 1 and 2: that she would be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it alongside her husband. So the consequences of her sin are basically disruptions to those good intentions.¹⁸ How?

First, in bearing children her pain will be multiplied. Now, this obviously refers to the physical pain of giving birth, but it's so much more than that. We typically just think of painful toil and thorns as a consequence for men, but no—women pay this price as well in their own unique way. This pain can encompass *all* the physical and emotional difficulties that go with children:

- from the journey of actually getting pregnant
- to the illness, discomfort, and anxiety of being pregnant
- to the life-threatening process of delivery
- to the recovery and sorrows of being postpartum
- to the exhaustion of keeping an infant alive
- to the strain of raising children
- to the fear of losing children
- to the identity crisis of not doing any of these things.¹⁹

But not only is her joyful child-bearing disrupted, so also is her joyful partnership with her husband. We read in the second half of verse 16,

¹⁷ Ross, Loc 1672-1679; Wenham, 161

¹⁸ Wenham, 162

¹⁹ Ross, Loc 1681-1686

*Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.” Genesis 3:16b*

It's important to remember here that these aren't commands or ideals to be followed, but more declarations of how life now will be. What we're seeing here is a consequence of sin—that God intended for the husband and wife to be drawn to each other in perfect unity, but now they'll naturally be contrary to one another. The woman, at her worst, will antagonize the man she was created to help; and the man, at his worst, will oppress the woman he was created to protect. As one writer puts it, “‘To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and to dominate’”.²⁰

So, this means that, because of sin, relationships between men and women *will be hard*—especially in marriage. For all who would come after the first man and woman, to pursue marriage as God intended it means painful toil and thorns—it won't come easy; you'll have to fight for it!²¹ And not only husband to wife, but also parent to child. Where do such consequences leave you? With a constant reminder of your sinful hearts and need for a Savior. And once again, whether for Old or New Testament believers, that is not a bad place to be.

This brings us to the third character in the story to receive consequences: the man. We read in verse 17,

¹⁷ 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;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ 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.” Genesis 3:17-19*

²⁰ Kidner, 71

²¹ Ross, Loc 1686-1702

It's easy to see here that the man receives the longest, most brutal list of consequences. As one author puts it, "man will labor painfully all the days of his life. His portion is sorrow, sweat, toil, and death: the dusty earth opposes his needs, resists his plow, and finally devours him whole."²² Why? Well, whereas the woman was told *about* God's command, the man received it straight from God himself.²³ And whereas the woman was deceived, the man sinned willfully by listening to the voice of his wife instead of God. This is why later the New Testament makes it clear over and over that

sin came into the world through one man [not through the woman], *and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*, Romans 5:21

What we have here is the Christian doctrine called human depravity. It teaches that the consequences of the man's original sin applies to all of us.²⁴ We don't just learn sinful behavior and then become sinners—the Bible teaches that we are sinful by nature *from the womb*.²⁵ So Adam and Eve, though real people, are also what we call archetypes: they represent every man and every woman who comes after them.²⁶ That's why we are owning *their* consequences as *our* consequences.

But I want to be clear about this, because in our Reformed zeal to not underemphasize sin we can take this a little too far: total depravity doesn't mean every human is total garbage, as bad as they could possibly be. That would be *utter* depravity. Instead, total depravity means the whole person—head, heart, and hands—has been infected by sin.²⁷ The image of God that exists in every person may be tainted by sin, but it's not destroyed. And this brings us right back to the soulful reality that woven into all of life is both beauty and brokenness.

The man, created in the glorious image of God, intended to be the keeper of the glorious garden of God, will now struggle to even feed himself and his family. Because of his sin, the very creation itself is cursed.²⁸ Romans continues to explain:

²² Kass, 116

²³ Genesis 2:16-17

²⁴ Wenham, 163; Ross, Loc 1703-1705

²⁵ Psalm 51:5

²⁶ Ross, Loc 1686-1702

²⁷ R.C. Sproul, "TULIP and Reformed Theology: Total Depravity," <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-total-depravity/>

²⁸ Ross, Loc 1705-1709

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility (or to use the King James Version, which would remind us of our journey in Ecclesiastes, “the creation was subjected to vanity”), not willingly but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Romans 8:20-22

What exactly does this mean, that our sin leads to creation’s bondage and corruption and groaning? Early American theologian Jonathan Edwards says it best I think:

Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God’s enemies.²⁹

Men, this all explains why our identity is so attached to the work of our hands; why no matter how much we thrive at a given vocation, the joy of it often alludes us, and the frustrations of it perplex us, and the competitions of it stress us; and why it will ultimately surpass us and leave us worn out and dead in the dust.

It’s a devastating truth, which is why most people won’t bear it. It’s the bitter reality that God gives out what we deserve. And yet once again, to embrace it leads us to longing for hope.³⁰

3) God Holds Out What We Desire - vv. 20-24

And so, just in time, we arrive at the third part of today’s passage, that God holds out what we desire. Read with me in verse 20 the amazing first words after all those heart-breaking consequences:

²⁰ The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Genesis 3:20

²⁹ Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/edwards_jonathan/Sermons/Sinners.cfm

³⁰ Ross, Loc 1714-1719

Now, this may not seem like much, but after all this death the man looks at his wife and gives her a symbolic name: Eve, meaning “life” or “life-giver”. It’s like he’s saying, ‘Because of me there is all this pain and sorrow and death; but in you, precious wife, I heard God’s promise of *life*.’ And for the first time in the Bible we see a fallen man clinging to good news, a posture that should compell our hearts. One author describes it this way: “the man sees the woman in yet another new light...not just as flesh to be joined, not just as another to impress and admire, but as a generous and creative [person, to whom he looks] in awe and gratitude.”³¹ She is a sign of the victory that would come.³²

And this should still be the case among us today as we cherish, especially our wives, but all women. And not simply because they are mothers or have the potential to be mothers, but because of their unique identity and ability to nurture others—which isn’t just for the raising of children but the discipling of people. Women, your life-giving powers are a living testimony to God’s hope for humanity, and you should be proud of that; and guys, we should be too.

And we should use this verse to help us understand some of those awkward New Testament passages that say things like this: “husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life”; and this one: “[women] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.” These are statements that aren’t meant to belittle but to affirm, to point us back to Genesis 3:20 and the good news reflected in women’s God-given ability to nurture life, to bear offspring from whom would come the serpent-crusher himself, Jesus Christ.

And if that’s not hopeful enough, we continue reading in verse 21,

21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Genesis 3:21

What a compassionate Judge! God doesn’t simply deliver the verdict and command them to get out of his sight; he sees their need and he provides for it. This means the world’s first physical death takes place, the sacrifice of an animal in order to clothe sinful people. Imagine how meaningful this would have been to Genesis’ original readers who lived under the Old Testament sacrificial system. They would be able to say, ‘Look, from

³¹ Kass, 117

³² Ross, Loc 1722-1727; Kidner, 76-77

the beginning it has taken sacrificial blood to forgive sin, and from the beginning God provides that sacrifice!³³

In so doing this, God was reminding them of a couple of things. One, that indeed they *had* sinned and needed to be clothed. Adults being intentionally careless with nakedness is a shameful thing because it ultimately disregards our fallen nature. A significant exception to this, however, is within marriage, where we freely gain a sacred glimpse back into the world before the fall, where the man and woman were naked but were not ashamed.³⁴

The second reminder was that only God could ultimately provide the clothing of salvation that they needed. Their fig leaves weren't going to last a minute in the thorns of the new world they faced. Every time they saw the design and felt the warmth and sensed the protection of these new clothes, it had the potential to assure them that God alone relieves the shame of man.³⁵

Finally, we arrive at what might appear to be the saddest moment in the first three chapters of Genesis, but is actually yet again seasoned with hope. We read in verse 22,

²² Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" ²³ therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:22-24

God's perception at this point is that his beloved man and woman, already the walking dead, could possibly eat fruit from the tree of life and physically live forever in that state. He's so put off by this idea that he literally stops in the middle of his sentence and takes action to prevent it.³⁶ What this shows us, is that God had greater plans in store for humanity: not for them to live forever with a sinful nature; and also not for them to return to Eden somehow. That's why he himself drove them out of the garden.

And as sad as it is to consider what that must have been like for the man and woman, I think the deepest sorrow that's easily overlooked belongs to God. Remember, Eden is

³³ Hebrews 9:22

³⁴ Genesis 2:25

³⁵ Ross, Loc 1603-1606, 1727-1739; Wenham, 166

³⁶ Wenham, 167-168

the place where God was meant to dwell with humanity. For him to drive out his own children and seal off the entrance, that brought great finality to the loss for all of them.

And for the original readers of Genesis, their minds likely went to the idea of being expelled from the camp of God's people, which would be a living nightmare, an expulsion from God's presence, a fate worse than physical death.³⁷

Conclusion

Ok, what are we going to salvage this one? Face it—*there is no way back into Eden!* There are cherubim and a flaming sword guarding the door. And the Old Testament goes on to stack reminder upon reminder of this, such as the two massive cherubim that sat atop the ark of the covenant in the temple's holy of holies. But few would've seen them because only the high priest entered the holy of holies once a year. So to make this reminder more visible, guess what image adorned the temple walls and especially the curtains that covered the holy of holies—that's right, *cherubim*. And throw in there vivid colors and precious stones too. It might as well have said, "Genesis 3! Genesis 3! Genesis 3! God's presence is cut off to sinners—sorry! Paradise gained, paradise lost!"

³⁸

Except for a moment that would change *everything*. We read of it in the Gospel of Matthew:

⁵⁰ *And Jesus* [hanging from a cross] *cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.* ⁵¹ *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.* Matthew 27:50-51b

Through Jesus Christ the way back to God would be opened wide. Through him the cherubim would finally lay down their swords to give pass, and all who believe could hear this:

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,* ²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.* Hebrews 10:19-22

³⁷ Wenham, 173

³⁸ Ross, Loc 1606-1609; Wenham, 168

And from our privileged point of history, we can now look upon Genesis 3 and see that this was God's plan the entire time. When "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death [reigned] because all sinned," God the compassionate Judge of sinners already knew that one day "grace [would] also reign...leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."³⁹ So let's indulge *this* as we close...

Yeah, the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman would do battle, but the only one to ultimately crush the serpent's head would be Jesus Christ, as we're told in the book of Hebrews, "[Christ] himself partook of [flesh and blood], that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."⁴⁰

Also, yeah, the curse of death that came upon the whole world because of sin, only Jesus Christ could reverse that curse, as Galatians tells us, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree".⁴¹

Also, yeah, the sweat and thorns that sin brings into every moment of our labor, only Jesus Christ could give us the hope of relief and rest, by himself sweating great drops of blood in agony, and by wearing a crown of thorns.

Also, yeah, the dust to which we all are to return, without exception, only Jesus Christ could take on that dust of flesh, and then lay it down sacrificially for us, as we read of him in Psalm 22, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death."⁴² And because he rises from the dust, someday so can we. Not in order to go back to Eden, as though he's our ticket to paradise. But to go to *him*—because "in [his] presence is fullness of joy; at [his] right hand are pleasures forevermore. He is our restoration of joy in life and relationships and marriage and parenting and work. He is our paradise."⁴³ So let us do battle this morning church! Why are we settling for lesser Edens when he offers us himself.

³⁹ Romans 5:12, 21

⁴⁰ Hebrews 2:14-15

⁴¹ Galatians 3:13

⁴² Psalm 22:14-15

⁴³ Ross, Loc 1611-1615, 1745-1754

As a reminder that the way back home is still open, on the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ was laid in the dust of death and returned to life—for us.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let’s pray.

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