

**The Story:
The God Who Does Not Give Up On Us
Genesis 3
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, January 15, 2012**

Can I ask your opinion on something? What is wrong with the world today? Why are things so...bad?

About a century ago, the Times of London ran a provocative piece in the paper. At that moment, this particular newspaper was the most prestigious of all in the world. The editors invited well-known people to write their opinion on a particular question: "What is wrong with the world?" As you can imagine, the answers were greatly diverse and scholarly, filled with flowing arguments, and polished paragraphs. G.K. Chesterton, an accomplished Christian writer, known for his wit. In response to the question, what is wrong with the world, he wrote: "Dear Sirs, I am. Yours sincerely, G.K. Chesterton."

Though his response reflected great brevity, it also reflected vast profundity. The answer to the question, "What is wrong with the world today" is best answered by looking in the mirror, "What is wrong with me today?" It starts right here. Why am I so broken? What's wrong with this dude?

Why are we so selfish? Why are we so greedy? Why does it bother us when others are praised and we are not? Why are we so hateful to some people sometimes? Why do entertain such deplorable thoughts? All of us as human beings have to face the fact that we are really great sinners?

Even the apostle Paul, in the NT, said, "What's wrong with me? The things I want to do, I don't do. The things I know I shouldn't do, these things I do." Something is broken inside my soul, and it's bigger than a broken arm or a broken leg. It's beyond physical. Something has run amuck at the spiritual level.

Today's message goes to the bottom of our brokenness. Genesis 3 explains what happened to the human race and why we are still reeling. Genesis 3 explains man's biggest problem. Let's see what we can find.

Genesis 3:1-13.

3:1 says that *the serpent was more crafty than all of the wild animals the Lord God had made.*

Here we see the entrance of evil into the world. We are not told why this evil exists in the first place. Later in the Bible, we are informed that there was a fall in heaven before there was a fall on earth. But it's not told to us here. This serpent is simply introduced as undesired intruder. Now, why God didn't wipe out that snake before it entered the garden? That is a mystery to the nth degree. We don't have time to debate that today.

The Bible pays no attention to answering that question. We are simply told, “and along came the serpent.”

Now, that word for “crafty”, referring to the snake...that word doesn’t mean that the serpent liked construction paper and Elmer’s glue. Not that kind of crafty. Without a doubt, the word has negative overtones—kind of like the word, precocious. Look up synonyms for precocious and you get “bright, talented, intelligent” but when someone says that a child is precocious, it has a hidden sarcasm. The child is too smart for his own good. In the same way, this word, crafty, when we read it, it smacks of something being amiss.

But you will find this insightful: In the original Hebrew, that word for “crafty” can be used for positive or for negative, depending on the context. In other places in the Bible, that same word is used in a good way to mean “prudence.” For example in Prov. 12, it says a “prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself.” It doesn’t mean a “crafty man,” a sneaky, tricky person. No, a wise man knows when to keep his mouth shut. He is superior to others in this way. That word means something good.

So when it says that the serpent was more crafty than all the others, I suspect that it means this particular creature was especially endowed by God. Satan is a creature, he is not a CREAT-ORE. He is not a dualing god, with equal might, like Zeus vs. Poseidon in Greek mythology. No, Satan is painted in Scripture as a being with limited power, borrowed power.

And before God created man, he created this powerful angelic being and gave him great privilege. He was given unusual smarts. But like all good gifts of God, when perverted or twisted, it becomes a tool for heinous evil rather than an instrument for great good. The gift of sex, we know, has enormous power inside marriage, outside of marriage it has life altering capabilities. So, Satan took his greatest strength and twisted it to a vice.

Now, when we jump to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, chapter 12, we are explicitly told that the snake is a manifestation of Satan. We are told later that Satan works through smooth talk. He is a smart mouth, and his smart mouth sucks a lot of people into his web. The Bible is very clear that the serpent has unmatched power among creatures, not in anyway equal with God, but he has more strength than any person who ever lived. So Jesus said to Peter, “Look out! Satan wants to sift you like wheat.” This being is a force to be reckoned with.

Scripture says that this “Being” is still seeking to intrude into every home and every life, and he is likened now more to large prowling lion than to a small garter snake. Jesus prayed that we would be led away from him, that we would not have to face him.

But Eve does face him. He finds her and like so many others, she falls under his spell. He starts in with his smart mouth. V.1, “Did God really say that?” *“Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?”* Notice what he is doing. The question has just enough cynicism to spark her interest? His question is aimed at the wisdom of

God. Did God really say something so ridiculous—like an employee that shuts the door quietly and says to his co-worker: “Can you believe what the boss has just announced?” This question is loaded. It smuggles in the assumption that we as creatures have a right to stand in judgment of what God has said. The idea never crossed the mind of Eve, until that day. The devil messes with her mind. “Are you going to just stand there, Eve, and be a “yes woman.” Don’t you think it high time for you to “Think for yourself, sister?”

And notice also the way he frames the question, with some measure of intended exaggeration. “Did God say that all the trees are off limits, really?” “Hmmm.” You see what he is doing, he is casting God in the light of the cosmic killjoy, the ultimate party pooper.

Even today, people foolishly believe this lie—that God’s great aim is put rules and regulations upon us that would rob us of levity. He’s a great big fun hater. God basically exists to make sure I have no fun. Eve, can you believe that God put the joy tree out of your reach?

She replies initially with grace. She corrects him on his facts. She says, v.2...

But then she adds her own exaggeration. “And you must not touch it.” God didn’t say anything about touching it.

And then comes the first overt contradiction of God. “You will not certainly die (v4).” The first doctrine in the Bible denied is the doctrine of judgment. If we cut that one out of the story, if we get rid of God as the judge, then we can assume those places, we can do as we please. A position that the people of God would later presume and regret—they would rule themselves.

Here, Satan tempts Eve to take back the throne of judgment. V.5....

And what’s so bad about knowing good from evil? Isn’t good for a man to know the difference between right and wrong? Why would God want his humans to be naïve? No, that’s not the problem. There is more here than discernment. The issue at stake is not knowing right from wrong, but being the one who decides what is right and wrong. Satan suggests: Once you eat that fruit, you will finally be able to declare what you think is inbounds and what you think is out of bounds.

Have you ever done that? I know what God wants, but I’m going to do my thing. I sense where God is calling me. I’ll get there eventually. He can wait. I’ve got a good thing going there.

Eve seeks to graduate to God-like status and make her own decisions in life, thank you very much.

She claims her independence.

Now, let's talk for a moment about this tree. There is no text that calls it an apple. As if God really hates apples, but bananas are the best. And it's not that this one fruit contains magical power, like some Disney fairy tale, where this fruit suddenly breaks the spell and a person has the power to pronounce good and evil. That's not the point either.

The fruit is not the focus; it's the desire for independence. What is at stake here is bigger than breaking a rule. This is the beginning of a revolution, the Serpent seeks to overthrow God as King. He came to steal, to kill, to destroy. And that day in the garden, he gathered his first friends.

And v.6...and she ate it.

And once it was done it was forever done. There is no going back. Can you imagine Lee Harvey Oswald trembling with this finger on the trigger? Once I pull this lever, there's no going back. Eve pulled the trigger. There was no going back.

So, from there, she and Adam take up sewing. They hold their own home economics class and they put some fig leaf clothes together. This is meant to be silly because we all know that you can't hide your mistakes with makeshift clothing. They did not realize at the time the full ramifications for the future, like a man who has an affair. He doesn't think fully about the fact that once done, this cannot be undone. And once done, the consequences are far greater than he first thought.

There is no going back to the way they once were. They are now covered in shame. And so there is a broken fellowship between God and human beings. There is a broken connection, an intimacy that was now lost. To use the adultery image again, a man who has been married for 20 years in a wonderful marriage, when he goes out for a one-night stand, makes that one decision, he is no longer able to look his wife in the eyes. There is shame. He hides. There are certain things they can't talk about anymore.

Throughout other parts of the Scripture, God is presented as the betrayed husband because his own people have found another love. In Hosea, his people are called the harlot. They have destroyed the relationship at the deepest level.

And there is now conflict between them and God, but also between one another. The language of v. 12 is almost funny. *"The woman you put here with me! It's her fault."* Not the first man to blame his wife for his problems. Adam does not man up and take responsibility. He just ducks. And now the curses come forth.

V.14 and following, we see three curses.

- God curses the serpent. Some people see this as an explanation of how snakes lost their legs. That's not the point. And when it says that God will place animosity between the snake and the woman, that does not explain why most women hate snakes. Or men either, for that matter. No, this is probing at a much deeper level. The Devil is cast to the ground. He is now robbed of all of his

dignity. He will now be the greatest receiver of shame. He will be the lowest of low. And even worse, from the human race that he infected, there will rise ultimately a son that will “SLAM” his foot down on his head. By going to the cross, Jesus will destroy this serpent who accuses people and holds them to shame and guilt and sin and screams, “There’s no way back!” Gen. 3:15 declares, “Oh there’s a way back, but only God can do it.” God curses the serpent.

- God curses the woman. V.16... The first command given was to fill the earth with boys and girls, but now this process is filled with pain. The whole created order is whack. *“Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.”* Those two verbs are only used together in one other place. Chapter 4, we find out that one of the sons of Adam and Eve wants to kill the other son, the first homicide. When the Lord is describing to Cain, why He is angry with him. 4:7, *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”* Gen. 4:7 Sin desires to have you. That is, to control you, to boss you around. But you must rule over it. So also here, in the wake of the fall, the woman desires to have her husband, to control him. And he rules over her, with brutality, with force. He naturally beats up on her. The battle of the sexes begins; the propensity towards divorce. The marriage relationship is messed up. And so, the core of human community is in conflict. Only as people are made new creatures will they be able to truly love in this way again. There is a curse.
- God curses man. V.17... The whole created order is out of sorts. It does not work with man, it works often against him. From time to time, we see natural weather show off the wrath of God. We have seen that in our city with tornadoes. Some places have seen tsunamis. The coast has seen its share of hurricanes. The whole earth is crying out for peace and renewal. After the Fall, man now had to contend with the Earth. His work would become wearisome.

The curse has come to us all. To the serpent, to the man, to the woman, to the weather! We could spend much more time fleshing this out, but we must not miss what happens next. This is the secret to understanding the whole scenario. V.21....

That’s an interesting outfit. Adam and Eve used plants to make their coverings. God kills animals. At this point, there is no sacrificial system, no priests, no temple, none of that. That comes later. But God knows they need to be covered. He doesn’t say, “Take off those crazy fig leaves.” If you will just expose yourself and be honest, we can put this back together. And live happily ever after.” No, he doesn’t say that. There is no way for them to turn back. He covers them with something more durable, but at the price of an animal, which sheds its blood. The first of a long trajectory of bloody sacrifices that reach all the way down to the blood of Jesus, who is announced by a progenitor as “The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” By his bloody sacrifice, we are covered over. Our shame.

3:21 is only the beginning of the bloody trail. And you will hear much, much more about that as the story unfolds next week.

Now, then, let's consider the so what's of this text. What does this mean for us today?

The Fall: So What?

1. **Have you gotten right with God?** When you and I think about sin, we often think of it horizontally, how our sin affects other people. So, the problem with murdering a man is that it affects his wife and his kids who are reeling in his loss. That is true, but the greater issue at stake with murder is that a man presumes to play the role of God by removing an image of God from the earth. God made people. He owns people. It is an offense against God to just go out and kill somebody. That is a violation of government law, but a far more serious thing is that it breaks God's laws. That must be dealt with now.

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he prayed in Psalm 51, "Against you and you only have I sinned." Well, he did sin against Uriah the Hittite by committing murder, no doubt, but ultimately his sin was against the King and Judge of all mankind. He would have to answer to God for his sins.

So, when you mess up, and commit a sin against a brother, you do need to seek his forgiveness, repenting and confessing your crime, but even more, a sinful man must get right with God if he is going to be truly free of guilt. Are you right with God?

2. **Are you dealing with your deepest issue?** If our greatest problems are physical, then we should spend the rest of our lives building more Mayo Clinics. If our greatest problem is psychological, then we should raise up an army of counselors. But if our greatest need is spiritual, then we need something more than hospitals and life coaches. What we need the most is someone to save our souls.

Genesis 3 delivers to us a grave diagnosis. You are the problem. You have desired to live free of him, ruling over your own way. The supreme problem on the planet is our alienation from God, our broken fellowship with him.

What is wrong with the world today? I am.

Who can fix me? (Long pause)

Hmm. Only one.

And it would cost him everything.