

“BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS” **(Genesis 3:14-24)**

At home I have a joke book I used to read to the kids, and along with way-too-many knock-knock jokes, there are several good news-bad news jokes. One of the classic ones is about the airplane pilot who tells his friend that he recently crashed his plane. His friend says, “That’s bad.” “It wasn’t too bad,” said the pilot, “I had a parachute.” Well, that’s good. “No that’s bad – the parachute wouldn’t open.” That is bad. “No, it’s good, there was a haystack right below me.” That’s good. “No, that’s bad. There was a pitchfork sticking up out of the haystack.” That’s bad. “No, it’s good – I missed the pitchfork.” That’s good. “No that’s bad – I missed the haystack too.” And on and on it goes.

I thought of this joke as I read our passage today in Genesis 3 because it is interspersed with bad news and good news – and depending on what part you focus on, you can come away from the text discouraged or encouraged. It describes both the painful consequences of sin and the remedy for sin. It describes both God’s judgment and God’s grace. Every religion and philosophy seeks to explain why the world is the way it is and how we are to deal with it. What makes Christianity unique from all other beliefs is the gospel – the good news that Christ has come to earth to save us. In order for us to receive that good news – in order for it to make sense – we must first come to grips with the bad news of our human condition and why we need saving. And this is no better summarized than in our passage in Genesis 3:14-24.

Genesis 3 is the pivot chapter of the whole Bible. Without it we would not understand why there is pain and suffering, and we wouldn’t understand why Jesus had to die on the cross. Nothing in the rest of the Bible would make sense. In chapters 1-2 we see God create a perfect world – laying out everything in perfect order and design for man and woman to flourish. There was no pain or heartache or suffering – there was no conflict or fighting – and there was no death.

But Adam and Eve, given the choice to trust and obey God, decided to be their own god and eat of the forbidden fruit. And God lets them, but not without a cost. God built into the fabric of the universe the law of sowing and reaping – to every action there is a consequence – in verses 14-19 God pronounces judgment or curses on the three participants in the fall – the serpent, then Eve, then Adam – the effects of which linger today. Each of these judgments represents a part of our human existence that we struggle with on a daily basis.

The first judgment – given to the serpent – represents an ongoing **spiritual struggle**. Verses 14-15... So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 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.”

Two curses are pronounced on the serpent or Satan. First, God says, “You will be the most despised and scorned among all the animals. You will crawl on your belly and eat dust.” Some think that prior to this the serpent walked on four legs, but now is cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust as a sign of humiliation.

This was a huge fall from grace as Satan – who represented himself as a serpent – was once the highest-ranking angel – closest to the throne of God – but he rebelled against God and God kicked him out of heaven. The Hebrew word for serpent means “shining one,” and before the fall was a beautiful creature, but is now cursed and brought low.

Throughout history snakes have symbolized evil and darkness and danger. I think of Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* movie where the serpent slithers up to Jesus in garden as He's wrestling with temptation. The gospels don't mention a snake in Gethsemane, but Mel Gibson used it to symbolize Satan.

The second curse on the serpent is the announcement that there would now be unending conflict between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of Eve. Satan may have thought he had defeated God's most prized creation by causing Eve to fall, but Eve is going to go on to have kids, and one of those kids is going to crush his head. The serpent is also going to have offspring, and his offspring are those who belong to his evil family – starting with the fallen angels (or demons) who were cast out of heaven along with him. His offspring would also include people who align themselves with Satan and oppose God. Jesus told the Pharisees that they belonged to their “father, the devil” in John 8:44.

Every day Satan and his offspring are at war with humanity – he's seeking to turn people away from God and destroy them. Paul says in Ephesians 5 that our real enemy is not flesh and blood – it's not people, it's not politicians, it's not the world we see around us – our real enemy is the world we can't see – it's the unseen forces of darkness led by Satan that influences people and culture and leaders and institutions. Everything God is and stands for, Satan wants to destroy, and the battle rages all around us where things that used to be good are now evil, and what was once evil is now good. We are in the midst of an epic unseen, spiritual battle for souls.

That's bad... no that's good. Look at the end of verse 15... “He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Here we see the first glimpse of the gospel, and prediction that, in the end, good wins over evil – and the victory comes from the offspring of the woman – who is Jesus. He is unique from all other offspring in that He is both God and man – the perfect human to crush Satan's head.

But His victory over Satan does not come without suffering – the serpent, it says, will strike at His heel. Satan will inflict damage on Jesus – He will strike at Him and injure Him. On the cross, and leading up to the cross, Jesus suffered immense pain – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Satan thought He'd won, but three days later Jesus triumphantly rose from the grave, and delivered the fatal blow to Satan – crushing his head. In the *Passion of the Christ*, after the snake slithers up to Jesus, Jesus takes His foot and stomps on its head, killing it.

A bite on the heel stings, but crushing a head is fatal. That's the idea here. By His death and resurrection, Jesus showed complete dominance over Satan. Although Satan is still active in this world, he is a defeated foe and his doom is sure. Verse 15 tells us that from the very beginning God had a plan for salvation and that plan is given to us as soon as sin entered the world.

In verse 16 judgment God pronounces judgment upon the woman, and it pictures the **ongoing relational struggle** resulting from the fall... To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Because of Eve's role in the fall, she will now experience pain in her two primary relationships – with her children and with her husband. God says, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children.” One of life's greatest joys is announcing to family and friends that you're going to have a baby. Our son Matt, and his wife Bailey, announced a few months ago that they are going to have a baby in October, and you could not find two happier faces. Matt was so excited that he dyed his hair pink to announce that it was a girl – which doesn't surprise me at all.

But one of life's most happy occasions is mixed with pain. I've been told by good sources that the nine months of pregnancy is not easy, nor is giving birth to the baby. That's what I've been told. The implication is that this pain was not present – or as severe – as it was before the fall. Some couples experience a different kind of pain – the pain of wanting to have a child, but not being able to do so.

Not only would there be pain in childbirth, there would be pain in bringing children into a sin-cursed world. From the moment their baby is born, a mother's life is wrapped up in the well-being of her child. They worry about their health, they worry about their safety, they worry about their spiritual condition. Because of the fall, some children rebel and turn their backs on all you've taught them. And because of the fall, some parents suffer the pain of burying their child before themselves. The point is – that even the greatest moment of joy – in being a parent – because of the fall – is mixed with pain.

There's more bad news... the fall will also affect the woman's relationship with her husband. God says, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." This verse is a bit puzzling at first glance, because a woman desiring her husband seems to be a good thing, not a curse. The key, I believe, to understanding this is found in the next chapter of Genesis – in 4:7 – which uses the same idea here to describe the result of Cain killing his brother... Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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 rule over it" (4:6-7).

The same Hebrew word for "desire" is used here – the only other place it's used. It means the desire to rule – the desire to control. "Sin desires to rule over you Cain, but you must rule over it." It describes a conflict, a battle with sin. So when we come back to the curse on Eve in chapter 3, God is saying, "Your desire, Eve, will be to rule over your husband and control him, but he will rule over you." In other words, there is going to be an ongoing conflict between the sexes, and a battle for control and power.

Before the fall, this was never a problem. God made Eve from Adam's side to rule the earth and subdue it together – side by side. Before the fall, Adam was appointed by God to be the head – to be the leader – and he was the perfect leader. Before the fall, Eve had no problem with Adam leading – it came naturally. She never questioned it or protested her role – she happily served side by side with Adam. But now that she has a sin nature, she's going to stand up to Adam. She's going to challenge him and fight him.

And guess what Adam's going to do? He's going to fight back and say, "Oh yeah?" Sin, you see, causes the woman to try and usurp the man's authority, and man to use his authority to dominate. You have feminism on one hand, and chauvinism on the other. Sometimes I hear people say, "I have marriage problems," and I think, "Of course you do." Every marriage is under the curse of the fall.

Here's the good news... when a husband and wife both submit themselves to God's design for marriage, the power struggle in marriage goes away – not completely, but substantially. Ephesians 5 says that wives should willingly submit to her husband's authority in the home, and refuse the desire to seize control (22-24). Husbands are to love their wives unconditionally and sacrificially, just as Christ loves the church (25-30). From the beginning, God designed for there to be a mutual love and respect in marriage, and though sin has tainted the original beauty of this relationship, we are to pursue God's ideal, and as we do, we regain a bit of what was lost in the fall.

In verses 17-19 we come to the judgment on man, and in this curse we see an ongoing **physical struggle** to exist... To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 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.”

God highlights the fact that Adam – whom He appointed leader – listened to his wife and not God. She was deceived by the serpent, but Adam sinned with his eyes wide open – he knew it was wrong but did it anyway – and like Eve, he will suffer painful consequences.

It’s interesting how each judgment matches or corresponds to the action committed. The serpent was proud, and God brought him low. Satan ruined the human race, and God promised to ruin Him. Eve led her husband to sin, and she will now be ruled by him. Adam ate of the forbidden fruit – now he will labor to obtain food... “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.”

In chapter 2 God gave Adam work to do – He told him to work the ground and take care of it – to grow crops and make life flourish on earth for His glory. God provided everything Adam needed to do it – He gave him rich land, He gave Him seeds to plant, and water flowing in every direction to irrigate his crops. Although Adam had to work, he never had to worry about having food or sweating to get it. But now obtaining food would be a struggle. Now he would have to contend with thorns and thistles that would try to take over his crops.

Romans 8 said that the earth itself has been cursed by the fall, and it groans as it waits to be liberated from the effects of the fall. Now Adam and every farmer after him would have to worry about drought and floods – they’d have to deal with insects and diseases – scorching heat and freezing temperatures.

But there’s a deeper meaning to this curse, and that is spelled out in the book of Ecclesiastes by Solomon who wrote... “What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless” (2:22-23). After the fall, work will not only be harder, but more frustrating. Solomon was able to accomplish things we can only dream about doing – building great buildings and parks – and accumulating all kinds of wealth – but it left him feeling empty. He worked and he worked and he worked, but it never gave him the satisfaction he thought it would. It’s no surprise that two-thirds of people say they hate their jobs. We always think something better is out there and that the grass is greener on the other side.

The good news is that being rightly related to God changes our outlook on work. Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 says, “I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.” As believers we recognize that in a fallen world, work will often be hard and frustrating – but it’s still a gift from God given to us before the fall. With this perspective we don’t spend our lives looking for greener grass – we bloom where we’re planted and whatever God gives us to do, we do it with all of our might for His glory.

Back to the bad news in verse 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.” Adam’s toil in life would continue until he died and his body would return to the dust from which he was made. Death is the ultimate consequence of sin. The wages of sin, Romans 6:23 says, is death. Adam actually lived to be 930 before he died, but he died, and so will everyone who is born after Adam.

If the Bible ended with Genesis 3:19, it would end with bad news. It would end with no hope for God’s creation – we live, we struggle, and we die. The end. D.L. Moody, the great evangelist, said that the hardest part of leading someone to faith in Christ is getting them to sense deeply their lost condition – to help them see that they are sinners in desperate need of a Savior. If you can get them lost, Moody said, getting them saved is easy. It’s like a person doesn’t recognize their need for a lifeguard until they are drowning. Once we see we are drowning in sin, we’ll cry out to the only one who can save us from eternal death and plead for his mercy.

That’s why, in presenting the gospel, we must not rush too quickly to the good news – we can’t wait to get there – but for there to be good news, there must first be bad news. Thankfully, the story does not end in verse 19, and in verses 20-24 we find good news. We find hope. Even though Adam and Eve rebel against God and deserve nothing from Him, God reaches down to them in grace and mercy.

God provides them with three things. First, in verse 20, He provides them with **continuation of life**... “Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.” It seems strange that right after God pronounces that Adam and his race will die, he names his wife Eve – which means the mother of all the living. This is a sign of hope. While Adam accepts that he must live in a fallen world and return to the ground, he recognizes that God is not done with him and Eve. He believes God’s promise in 3:15 that he and Eve will have babies, and one of their offspring will crush the serpent’s head and reverse the effects of the fall. He believes in faith that there is a better life to come.

More good news is found in verse 21, where God provides them with **covering for their shame**... “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” When Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately felt a sense of shame, and they tried to cover up their shame with the nearest thing they could find – they took fig leaves from a tree, sewed them together, and used them to cover their nakedness.

Fig leaves represent various ways people try to deal with guilt and cover their shame – whether it’s addictions, staying busy, religion, or trying to be a good person. Fig leaves may work for a while – temporarily – but they can’t eliminate the sense of shame we feel. It’s something only God can do.

Instead of leaving them dressed in fig leaves, God lovingly and graciously provides them with garments of skin. What has to happen to get garments of skin? An animal has to die. Up to this point, nothing in the garden had ever died. Adam’s sin brought death into the world, and the first thing to die is an animal.

What did the animal do? Nothing. The animal was completely innocent. It doesn’t say, but I think that Adam and Eve were rocked by the death of this animal – they’d never seen death before – and they realize the seriousness of sin – that an innocent sacrifice – someone who had nothing to do with their sin – had to be sacrificed and shed its blood for their sins to be covered.

This will be the first of many animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, and through them God is teaching His people that in order to have the guilt of sin removed, someone must die in the place of sinners. All of these animal sacrifices, of course, looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, “Behold – the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” Like the animal that died to cover Adam and Eve, Jesus was innocent of sin – yet He bore the penalty of sin in His body so that we can be clothed in His righteousness. It reminds us that there’s nothing we can do – no amount of good works – that can make us acceptable to God. Salvation is purely based on God’s grace and mercy. All we must do is receive it and trust in Christ for salvation.

In verses 22-24 we see a third provision of God – **protection from eternal fallenness...** 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.” So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 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.”

Genesis 3 appears to end with bad news as Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden of Eden and denied access to the tree of life. Being cut off from the tree of life means that they will die. The idyllic life they enjoyed in Eden is gone.

That’s bad news. No, that’s good news. Let’s say that God allowed Adam and Eve to stay in the garden and eat from the tree of life. If they ate of the tree of life they would continue to live – Adam would have lived way past 930 and would still be alive today. The only problem is that he would live forever with the effects of a fallen world with no relief. There comes a point in life, especially when you grow older, when you’re ready to leave this world of aches and pains behind and head to glory. Amen?

God, in His mercy says, “Rather than let you live forever with the awful consequences of sin, and all the pain and heartache of this fallen world, I’m going to graciously block access to the tree of life and let you die.” Have you ever thought of death as a blessing? God says, “I’m going to let you die so that one day you can be raised to a better life – free from death and crying and mourning and pain.” That sounds good to me! It gives us a whole new perspective on death – it is not the end, but just the beginning of something much, much better.

For their own good, God drives Adam and Eve out of the garden and He places cherubim – angels assigned to protect God’s glory –with flaming swords to protect the way to the tree of life. But the tree is still there. At the end of Revelation, we read that in the life to come we will once again eat from the tree of life. That’s because Jesus – the way, the truth, and the life – makes it possible for us to be reconciled with God and go back to Eden.

The main message of our passage today is sin brings suffering and death – the effects of which we live with every day. But God graciously provides us redemption and hope – that if we acknowledge our sin to Him, and trust in Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf, we gain back everything we lost. We receive forgiveness, eternal life, and hope that we will once again return to Eden and eat of the tree of life. And despite all the bad news, our story ends with eternal good news.