

Sermon for March 5, 2017 – Lent 1

Genesis 3:1-7 (EHV)

Theme: How We Became Corrupt.

- 1) The Temptation
- 2) The Sin
- 3) The Result
- 4) The Resolution

^{3:1}Now the serpent was more clever than any wild animal which the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden,³ but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die.’”⁴The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die.⁵ In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.⁷The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists.

I often get asked the question: “Why is there so much evil on this earth?” The Bible tells us: it’s because mankind is sinful. And I don’t just mean the “mankind” outside these church walls; I mean all of us. We are all sinful, and all the evil we see in the world is a result of it.

But how did mankind become this way, and is there any solution to all the evil we see around us? Let us let Scripture answer these questions for us this morning, under the theme: **How We Became Corrupt.** 1) *The Temptation* 2) *The Sin* 3) *The Result* 4) *The Resolution.*

Part One: The Temptation

Our sermon text takes place sometime after God had declared everything he made “perfect” on the 7th day of creation. We don’t know exactly how long this perfection lasted, but at some point Satan – a formerly good angel – desired to be god and rebelled against him.ⁱ God cast Satan and his followers out of heaven. Since the devil couldn’t overthrow God, he decided to try to do the next best thing: ruin God’s creation by leading man into sin.

Taking possession of a serpent,ⁱⁱ the devil came up with a plan to cause Adam's and Eve’s downfall. You see, there was a special tree God created in the middle of the Garden of Eden: a tree that would confirm Adam and Eve in their state of righteousness if they obeyed God’s command concerning it. But if the devil got Adam and Eve to rebel against the LORD’s command - well,

then mankind would die: that is, separate themselves from God and become objects of his just wrath.

So, while Adam and Eve were together in the garden, Satan *said to the woman*, “*Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’*”

Notice the misleading question Satan poses to Eve - meant to cast doubt on God’s goodness. It’s as if he is saying: “Is God keeping you from eating all this good fruit? If not, then why don’t you eat from this tree here in the middle of the Garden. What? You can’t? Well, why won’t God let you eat any fruit? He must be pretty mean!”

Yes, the devil tried to confuse Eve, just like he tries to confuse us today, with thoughts like: “Did God really say you can’t have any luxuries in life?” (No, God did not say that. What he said is that we shouldn’t pursue them above him.) “Did God really say that making love is wrong?” (No, God said that intimate relationships are reserved for husband and wife in marriage.) Did God really say that we can’t love our family? (No, what he said was that we shouldn’t love anything more than him.) . . .

I think you get the picture: the devil still tries to confuse us regarding God’s Word and goodness by presenting us with false choices.

Well how did Eve handle this temptation? ²*The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, ³but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die.’”*

Eve does well by pointing to what God really said: they could eat from any tree in the Garden, except one. And why not from that tree? Because God did not create the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for consumption. That tree’s purpose was to give Adam and Eve a way to demonstrate their trust in God. How so? Because if Adam and Eve truly loved and trusted in God above all things, they would happily listen to what God said and obey his command. Good is always trusting and obeying God; evil is doubting and disobeying God – hence the name of the tree: the knowledge of Good and evil.

Adam and Eve trusted that God forbade them to eat of the fruit of that tree for a good purpose. This is probably why Eve adds that they shouldn’t even touch it, lest they disobey God and thereby separate themselves from both him and his goodness (for, ultimately, that is what death is).

⁴*The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die. ⁵In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

Notice how boldly the devil contradicts God: “You won’t die. Actually, your life will be better: you will be like God. He’s holding out on you.”

What the devil did with Eve he still does today, saying things like: “No harm will come to you if you disregard God’s commandments. Everyone’s doing it and look: they’re all ok. God’s

commandments are keeping you from enjoying life. Why not do whatever it is you want to do? Pursue your desires. Follow your dreams. Be your own god and in control of your own fate.”

Yes, with every temptation, the devil is trying to convince us that God does not have our best interest at heart – that his commands are keeping us from true joy and happiness. He tries to get us to forget all the many blessings God graciously gives us, and focus on the few things God withholds from us for our good. He does this because He wants us to doubt God.

Every temptation to sin, therefore, is a temptation to unbelief; for if we truly believed in God, we would do what he commands. But when we don’t obey him, then we show that we don’t fear, love and trust in him above all things. This is what makes every sin so serious, as we will see next.

Part Two: The Sin.

What should Eve’s response to the devil have been? She should have considered all the wonderful love the LORD had shown her, called out to him in prayer - informing the LORD that some snake was trying to get her to doubt him, and kindly ask him to exterminate it! But instead of doing these things, Eve began to waiver into unbelief - entertaining the thought that the devil might be right: that God was holding out on her and preventing her from reaching her true potential.

And here’s the sad irony: the Scriptures say that God created Adam and Eve in his likeness and image.ⁱⁱⁱ They were already perfect and holy. If they would have kept God’s command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they probably would have been confirmed in their righteousness; just like the good angels were, who didn’t join the devil’s rebellion in heaven.

Sadly, this didn’t happen. ⁶*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

Notice the progression: the woman now viewed the tree that was never meant for food as being “good” for food. As she doubted God, a lust grew in her heart to have the very thing that God forbade. She wanted to be free from God and obtain the wisdom the devil promised. She doubted God and took the fruit. And just as the devil wanted others to join him in his rebellion against God, so Eve wanted her husband to join her also. Sadly, he was all too willing. Being there the whole time, he willingly disobeyed God’s command. Why? For the same reason as Eve: he doubted God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what you see happening to Adam and Eve happens to all of us when we sin. When we doubt God, our heart becomes perverse. We start to see things differently than God intended, imaging that the things God wants us to avoid are actually good and not evil. We listen to the devil, the world and our own sinful desires, believing that their wisdom is better than God's. “We won’t die. No harm will come to us. It’s only a little sin. . . “

But sin is never harmless. The results are always devastating, as we see in what happened next.

Part Three: The Result.

⁷The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists.

I know. At first glance the result of Adam and Eve sin does not seem all that bad. They didn't keel over dead, did they?

Actually, they did die the moment they ate of the forbidden fruit – just not in the way we think of death. Adam and Eve died spiritually. A separation took place between God and them; and they knew it. They were no longer pure and unselfish in thought. Their bodies were no longer objects of praise, but of lust. They felt selfish desires, guilt, shame, anger and a whole host of other emotions, which led them to try to cover themselves from each other.

Thus the poison of sin corrupted Adam, Eve and the whole human race after them. What was the result of their sin? If you were to read on after our sermon text, you would see. Suffering, sorrow, labor, pain and death all became common place because of sin. The human race became selfish and self-serving. Worst of all, man lost the image of God. He lost his relationship with the LORD and lived under the threat of eternal separation from God in hell. This is the result of sin: both Adam's and Eve's and our own.

Part Four: The Resolution

But what is the resolution? Is there any hope for us? Can we, in some way or another, earn back the righteousness we lost because of sin? In and of ourselves: no, we can't.

But with God, nothing is impossible. Even though all mankind certainly deserves the same fate as the devil and his angels, God pitied us. He promised Adam and Eve a Savior: someone who would crush the devil's power and rescue us from our sins.

Who is this Savior? It is Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. He won the righteousness we lost by perfectly keeping God's law in our place. Even though he was tempted in every way just like we are, he didn't sin - showing perfect trust, obedience and love to God the Father. Jesus also took all our sins upon himself and suffered the death they had earned. Because of this, our sins are forgiven. Through faith in him our relationship with God is restored. We are at peace, and look forward to the day when God will restore all things: rescuing all who turn to him in faith from this evil earth, and granting them life in a new paradise that will even be more glorious than the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the fall.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: what is wrong with the world around us? The answer is simple: sin. Mankind is utterly corrupt, the result of which is all the evil you see. What's the solution to the problem? Christ. He won the righteousness we need to stand before God. Through faith in him we stand forgiven. And we live in this forgiveness – not for ourselves, but to God's glory as we show the same unselfish love to our fellow man that Christ has shown to us. Yes, we live by faith

– trusting in God’s mercy to forgive us, and looking forward to the day when he will judge this earth, when he will usher his believers into his new creation, where there will be no sin, sorrow and death, but only peace, life and salvation forever more.

So we pray: Thank you, heavenly Father, for not giving up on mankind when Adam and Eve fell into sin. Thank you for sending your only Son to win back for us the righteousness we lost due to sin. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to awaken faith in our hearts by means of the Gospel so that we might be you renewed, restored and forgiven children – living in harmony with you both now and forever in heaven. Amen.

ⁱ Many theologians see Isaiah 14:12ff as not merely referring to Babylon, but also to Satan – especially when considering Jesus' statement in Luke 10:18, and the description of the dragon's fall in Revelation 12:7-9.

ⁱⁱ That the serpent is Satan - Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3 and Revelation 12:9, 20:2; also John 8:44 (the devil being the father of lies, which our text records the serpent doing)

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Genesis 1:26-27