

Genesis 3:8-13

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In our prior lessons on Genesis 1–11, we have traced some of the main themes that form the basic biblical plot line, and indeed the plot line of the whole world. We have seen that at the center of God’s purposeful, creative work are two people who are privileged to live in God’s beautiful and abundant world. They are generously commissioned to live in relationship with God and as his images, filling the creation with others who bear God’s likeness, and managing God’s creation on his behalf and for his glory.

Beginning with Genesis 3, this happy story takes a sudden turn for the worse. Sin and evil are introduced into God’s perfect world, beginning what theologians call “redemptive history” —the story of how God fixes everything that mankind destroyed in the Fall.

Last week we looked at the opening seven verses of this chapter. We saw the temptation of the first woman and man in the garden, their giving in to that temptation, and finally the beginning effects of their sin — effects whose impact and significance will become increasingly obvious as the Bible unfolds. But the overall message of those first seven verses can be summarized like this: attempting to base your life on anything other than the revelation of God leads to disastrous consequences.

Genesis 3:8-13 build on that foundation and show very clearly that the disastrous consequences of sin extend to the personal, interpersonal, and spiritual, and they cannot be hidden from God. These verses speak of the initial and particular consequences of sin, and the impossibility of hiding these things from the Creator.

The precise moment at which the man and the woman crossed the line from sinless humanity to fallen humanity is not absolutely certain. Was it when they ate? Or when they determined in their heart that they would eat? Or when they began to question and doubt God’s Word and God’s good intentions for them?

But regardless of when sin entered the picture, there was a specific moment when the consequences of sin “kicked in,” so to speak. It began with an “opening of their eyes,” a change in their perception, a change in the way they interpreted what they saw and experienced. Their perception became tainted; it became skewed in an unhealthy direction.

The immediate consequence of this changed perception was that they could no longer look upon one another or walk about in their natural nakedness without feeling some sense of shame or embarrassment. Concerning this, Alec Motyer helpfully writes,

Having come to knowledge on the basis of sin, instead of on the basis of holiness ... no knowledge is now pure. Everything suggests a [possible] corruption. The old openness with which they had lived with each other, literally “naked and unashamed,” is replaced by a secretive awareness of self, and a desire to retire from the other, to hide, to retreat from the old un-self-protective mutuality ... Innocence has changed, but not into God-intended holiness, rather into fear, as each with “urgency and desperation” seeks protection from the gaze of the other. The world seen on the basis of disobedience and evil is very different from the world seen on the basis of obedience and good.

Motyer is alluding to the fact that the introduction of sin into the human experience has brought with it all sorts of new and distressing possibilities: the possibility of doubt; the possibility of not trusting others, even one’s own Creator; the possibility of deceiving and being deceived; the possibility of conflict with yourself; the possibility of fear. All sorts of things are now part of the human equation. Evil is no longer merely theoretical. It is real.

It’s like being in a zoo and discovering there is a lion in the African Safari exhibit. Now, as long as the lion is in the enclosure you feel safe and secure. To be sure, he is a menace, but only a theoretical one. But if out of the blue someone comes up to you shouting, “The lion has escaped! He’s running loose somewhere in the park!” suddenly, the evil is no longer theoretical or potential — it’s actual, it’s loose, all around you. That reality introduces a whole new range of feelings on your part: you want to run, to hide, to protect yourself in some way.

In a similar fashion, now that the man and woman have sinned, evil is no longer a theoretical possibility. It is a real menace, around them and even within them. The lion is truly out of the cage. And so, that new reality generates all sorts of new feelings: shame, guilt, a desire to run, to hide, to self-protect.

And those realities enter into and affect even the legitimate relationship that exists between the man and the woman. Indeed, since the man and the woman could doubt the Creator’s good intentions and purposes, then surely it was at least possible for them to doubt and wonder about the reliability of each other. And so, a certain tentativeness enters into that relationship, a feeling of vulnerability begins to creep in. The desire to hide and self-protect is nurtured — this feeling that perhaps complete transparency and openness might not be the best thing. Perhaps taking some protective measures might be the way to go.

And so they seek a covering of some sort, making use of some fig leaves to conceal their most private and intimate parts, those that relate to their sexuality. And no doubt they regard this covering as adequate, at least in terms of each other. To be sure, the shame and guilt and desire to hide are all still there, but these things are rendered at least manageable for the time being.

But then God shows up: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Now one of the fascinating things about this verse is that after God shows up, even though they have already dealt with their nakedness and have made coverings for themselves, they still run and hide.

Now, there is more going on here than just their sense of nakedness. But notice that the coverings they made seemed adequate when it was just the two of them, but inadequate when God showed up. Why is that? Why is it that when God arrives on the scene, even though they are covered up, they give in to this uncontrollable desire to run and hide?

Well, it's fairly obvious why they run and hide, isn't it? Because they both know that they haven't fixed the problem. They have not addressed the real issue. They hadn't undone what they had done or dealt with their actions. They had only dealt with the consequences of their actions, or at least the consequences most immediately relevant to them.

If God hadn't shown up, they might have been able to go on pretending that things were okay for quite some time, going about the place as they were, looking absolutely ridiculous with these fig leaves draped around their waists. But God does show up and they can't pretend anymore. And the fig leaves just won't do, so they run and hide.

Now, there's more to be said about the man and the woman, but let's shift gears for a moment to think about God's part in the story. As one commentator has observed, God's arrival in the garden was not just an afternoon stroll — it was God on a mission. Here is God, the very first missionary, seeking out these people who have been endowed with his own image, distorted and disfigured though that image had now become within them.

When God arrives in the garden, he is fully aware of all that has happened. God is, after all, omniscient. And so, while he does indeed ask, “Where are you?” it is not because he doesn't know. Rather, he asks the question for the man's benefit. God knows where the man and the woman are, and why they are there. But he wants them to see what he sees. He wants them to appreciate the gravity of their situation which, as yet, they clearly do not.

God could charge into the garden, march straight up to the man and woman, and pronounce sentence upon them. But instead, he graciously approaches them with a

question, drawing them out, or at least presenting them with the opportunity to step forward and come clean.

Well, with this question “Where are you?” we are witnessing, as one writer has noted, the beginning of redemptive history — a history that is not the story of people in search of God but the story of the God who comes looking for his people, and who will continue to do so over and over again, right through the centuries, culminating in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, who also came to seek and save the lost. The beginning of all this history can be traced back to the very first question which God asks in Scripture: “Where are you?”

When God questions the man, who represents the couple, it is obvious from the man’s response that he knows exactly what God is asking. In response to the question “Where are you?” the man doesn’t say “Over here!” Rather, he answers, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.” The man responds as if God had asked, “Why are you hiding?” So, the man is clearly aware of what God is after.

But notice what the man does not say. He doesn’t say, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid *because I disobeyed you*, and I hid myself.” The man doesn’t admit to any wrongdoing. He only talks about the condition that resulted from his actions, not the action itself. In other words, he is still trying to hide what he’s done, trying to deceive God, trying to avoid dealing with the real issue.

Well, of course, God is not at all thrown off by this attempted misdirection play. He “keeps his eye on the ball,” so to speak, and asks, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” Once again, God already knows the answer to the question. Once again, we see an illustration of his grace and patience toward his exasperating people.

And, once again, when given the opportunity to come clean, the man balks. He ducks and weaves and dodges and twists. In response to God’s very direct question, the man gives a very indirect answer. The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” As Hamilton says, the man, who has blatantly sinned and is the guilty party here, makes himself out to be the victim of both the woman’s actions and God’s actions.

First of all, he points the finger at God. Imagine the audacity of reminding God that it was he who created the woman for the man, as if to say, “You know, God, if you hadn’t brought her to me, none of this ever would have happened.” And then, as if that alone is not enough, he goes on to “remind” God that it was the woman who gave him the fruit. She was the one who led him astray and enticed him.

And so, it is only after implicating both God and the woman that the man finally, at the last possible moment and in extremely minimalist fashion, admits, “I ate.” Again,

as if to say, “Yes, okay, I did it, but only after all these other things happened. I mean, come on. You can’t blame me, can you?”

The man demonstrates here a fundamental unwillingness to admit his own wrongdoing, to accept responsibility for what he has done. As Cassuto points out, the man’s attempt to shift even part of the blame to the woman is as cowardly as it is pathetic, since it doesn’t at all explain his failure to resist the will of the woman. Yes, she offered him the fruit, but he still chose to take it and eat it. Nobody held a gun to his head and made him do it. He did it because he wanted to do it, which is the very thing he is unwilling to admit to God.

Well, from there, God turns to the woman. Now, he is not finished with the man, but he wants to get to the bottom of all this, so he keeps moving on. With the woman, he asks a different question, yet it still drives at the same idea: “What is this that you have done?” And following the lead of her husband, the woman points the finger somewhere else: at the serpent who deceived her. Only then does she admit, at the last, that she ate. Again, the woman’s desire is the same as the man’s: to avoid taking responsibility for her actions and to cast herself in the best possible light, not as the guilty party, but as the poor victim of another’s deception.

And so, with that last statement by the woman, the principal characters in this sordid drama we call “The Fall of Mankind” have all been exposed. And from this point God will begin to measure out his just and justified response to this frontal assault on his person and purposes.

Let’s think about some of the implications of these verses for God’s people. How would these verses have been significant to the people who first received them — the people of God with Moses in the wilderness? They had left behind the land of Egypt and their former slavery. They had wandered around in the desert for 40 heart-breaking years as a result of their faithlessness, disobedience, and refusal to enter and take the Promised Land. And now, as they receive this story from Moses, they are on the edge of the Promised Land.

These people do not need to be told that the world is a fallen place. They do not need any proof that sin is real. They have seen and experienced these things first hand. They saw it in themselves and in others as they suffered for 400 years under the cruel hand of Pharaoh. They did not need to be told that these things were real, but they did need to be told where these things came from in the first place. More importantly, they needed to know whether their situation was hopeless and futile, whether they were an aberration in the scheme of things, whether there might be some rival power or entity out there that might threaten to undo all that God is doing.

But even more than that, in hearing and receiving these accounts through Moses, they would have seen where their own sin and suffering came from. They would have been reminded of how at the root of all this was an unwillingness to accept the

revealed will of God. They would have been reminded of the danger of adding to or ignoring God's Word in any way. They would have been reminded that no one can sin with impunity.

And so here were these people, about to enter into a land that was their special place — a paradise of their own. And just as in the garden, they too were the recipients of God's revealed will, even more extensively than Adam and Eve. And the question for these people was this: Would they hear this account of the man and the woman and learn anything? Would they see that their remaining in the Land, and in fellowship with their covenant God, was linked to their responsiveness to him through his revealed will? These accounts would have been very important for God's people in Moses' day.

For God's people in our own day, just as was the case in other ages, these words provide a sobering description and explanation for why we are the way we are, why we behave the way we behave, what the requirements are for remaining in God's paradise, and why we personally will never be able to meet them.

Can you look at these verses in any detail and not be forced, all along the way, to hang your head and admit that you are not a stranger to any of the behaviors displayed here in and through the life of the first man and woman?

Haven't you ever doubted the goodness of God and the trustworthiness of God and, as a result, attempted to take matters into our own hands, choosing to rely upon yourself and your own ability to secure whatever it is that you feel you must have - only to make a royal mess of things in the end? Who has never done this?

Haven't you ever been guilty of adding to what God has said, or of regarding your own impressions and ideas as being equal to God's revealed will, or, in actual fact, as being more important than what God has said?

Haven't you allowed your own personal fulfillment to stand in the place that belongs only to God? And in pursuit of that pathetic idol, haven't you ignored the countless blessings and undeserved goodness God has given you?

Haven't you ever known the experience of guilt and shame, or of fear, and wanted to hide or run away because of those things?

Haven't you ever attempted, when confronted by your own sin and failure, to shift the focus away from your own actions and onto your condition, away from what you have done and onto what you are feeling?

Haven't you ever tried to avoid responsibility for what you have done? Haven't you ever tried to shift the blame from yourself onto others, and made yourself out to be the victim rather than the perpetrator?

Can any of us look at these things and doubt, for a single moment, that these people are *our* people, *our* ancestors? Can you look at this picture and see these characteristics, yet honestly say that you don't see the family resemblance here? Is this not us? Are we not the heirs of these people? Does their blood not run through our veins?

And do not people today — still — in an effort to hide their nakedness before God, and to conceal their guilt and shame, go out and find all sorts of ways to try and cover it up, all sorts of ways to assuage their bruised consciences and tender egos, to convince themselves that everything is alright and that everything will be alright?

Do we not see this same sort of moral and spiritual schizophrenia all over the place in our own day? On the one hand, we see people who are willing to acknowledge the existence of pain, and evil, and brokenness and shame and guilt — a kind of “nakedness.” And yet, at the same time, they are unwilling to admit the real explanation: the personal/psychological disintegration we experience and the social distortions that we endure are all symptoms of a deeper and fundamental spiritual/cosmic disruption, namely, we creatures are in rebellion against our very own Creator. Isn't this all around us? People will readily admit they are not perfect. But in the very next breath, they deny that God has any place in this, or any ultimate claim upon any of us.

And just as for the man and the woman, these pathetic attempts at self-covering, self-atonement — at running away, or hiding, or shifting the blame, or victimization (which is just another form of blame-shifting) — all of these attempts at Fall-management are just to enable us to keep our consciences in check. They are the “fig leaf” by which we are just able to manage our interactions with one another. But these tactics and methods only remain effective when human beings are alone in the picture, comparing ourselves to ourselves, measuring ourselves by ourselves. As long as that is happening, people are able to maintain the illusion of “okay-ness.”

But then God shows up. When God shows up, our attempts at self-covering and self-righteousness, and our pathetic half-measures and fig leaves, are all shown to be what they really are: completely inadequate. When God shows up, we finally begin to see things as they are, and not as we imagine them to be.

And knowing these things, and seeing the way things are, ought to move us with both gratitude and compassion. With gratitude because we realize that it is only because God has shown up in our own lives, only because he has pursued us, and not let us get away with our fig leaves and our blame shifting and our denial of responsibility — it is only because of those things that we have any hope. It is only because God has determined to deal with our sin *personally*, and *personally* to provide an adequate covering for us — it is only because of those things that we have been forgiven, in spite of ourselves.

But if there is a motivation here for gratitude, there is also a motivation for compassion - evangelical compassion towards those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the reality is that we are surrounded by people who, like Adam and Eve, think they have dealt with or are dealing with their stuff, but they are not. They only live in that illusion because God hasn't shown up yet to deliver them from it. We need to pray that God will be merciful to them now. We need to pray that they will not end up like the pitiful people in Revelation 6:15-16 who, when confronted by the awesome presence of God, preferred to be crushed by the mountains than to stand unprotected, completely exposed before the penetrating gaze of a Holy God.

So, we need to pray that God will use us to make his presence very real to people today, through the gospel, so that they too can come face to face with our great God, have their consciences laid bare by his holiness, and then be comforted and covered by his goodness and grace and patience and mercy.