

The effects of sin and the entry of grace

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Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] So we come in this section of Genesis 3 to both the effects of sin and the entry of God's grace.

! This is a section that is crucial to our understanding of history.! But to make a different point, Augustine said this, he said, if we lack a Christian understanding of history, including a grasp of its beginning and end, we are condemned to wander round in circles, finding neither a way in nor a way out. And God in His goodness has given us these wonderful bookends at the beginning and end of the Bible in Genesis and Revelation, and we read the rest of the Bible, and indeed we read all of history as coming between these two bookends, so that we know that while things have been made perfect, Genesis 1 and 2, but have now gone wrong in the world, Genesis 3, the effects of sin, we understand that God is working to make everything new.

We get hints of that in Genesis 3, but we see it reach climax at the end of Revelation. And if we lose that sense of Christian history, that history is going somewhere, that it may be that the chaos in our world today, maybe the struggles in our hearts today, they might overwhelm us. We might think that we are doomed and the world is doomed to an endless cycle of painful repeat, but that is not Christian history. That's not what we have in the story, God's story.

But what we have already in Genesis 3 is that honest truth, that we live in a world that is both beautiful and it is broken. And we see the effects of sin bringing decay in so many ways, but we also get wonderful hints of hope. And maybe we are familiar with Genesis 3, 15 as the first word of the gospel, this coming seed who would crush the head of the snake. The God who made all things is the God of the covenant and he is not done. And he will work out his saving purposes. And to understand history, to understand our own stories, we need to know God's story. God's great rescue story, God's commitment to undo all the sin and the sorrow that we as people have brought into the world. And we can begin to trace that story here in Genesis 3, so that when everything begins to unravel on account of human sin, we see the beginnings of God weaving together a wonderful tapestry of grace, so that in the end he will make everything new.

And we're going to see both of those side by side this morning, but we're going to start with the effects of sin. That's the first big thing we're going to look at. Just a very brief recap of where we were last time. We saw that into God's perfect garden came the entry of evil in the form of the snake, the Satan, and he tempted Adam and Eve to doubt God's goodness, to doubt God's truthfulness, encourage them to reach out and grab the forbidden fruit, to remove God from the throne, that they might be there. And now we get the painful record of what happens next. We're going to see relationships are broken, that perfect creation is spoiled, that gender roles are distorted, that death enters their story. And we're reminded again, and we said this last week, that the early chapters of the Bible help us to make sense of the world that we see, the way that the world is, the wars of aggression, the killing, the sadness, the suffering, online lies and hate, why we fear and hate death as an enemy.

[4:12] But it's so significant that the first thing that comes after they've eaten, the first way that sin is felt. Did you notice it? Look at verse 7 with me. The first effect of sin is shame.

Their eyes are open, they realize that they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. In breaking God's commandment, there is this new awareness that they have rebelled against God, that they have acted against God's own heart. They know that they have dishonored their loving creator. And there is shame. And the instinct that follows shame, which is to try and cover up. And ever since then, that's been the way that we have operated. We can think of the great scandals. Maybe we can think of Watergate. Or we think in the UK of the post office accounting system, a cover-up scandal. Or we look much closer to home and we recognize

from childhood, it's been our instinct to claim, it wasn't me. Their eyes are open, but there's bitter disappointment.

Their eyes are open to their own shame. They want to hide away. Innocence is gone. Transparency is gone and it's replaced with shame. What is shame? Ed Welch, the biblical counselor, defines it this way.

Shame is the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you. This moves us beyond just bad behavior. Shame works to attack our sense of identity. I am unclean. I am exposed. I must be unworthy of love. And shame will lead us to hiding and to covering. And shame can become that label we attach to ourselves. Like Hester, Prince, Scarlet Letter, the badge of shame. Here are Adam and Eve created in the image of God. That was their initial perfect label that God placed on them. But because of sin and because of shame, they're now labeling themselves as unfit and unworthy. And shame is powerful. It has a power to make us feel unfit and unworthy, to be consumed with self-hate. And so the first effect of sin is shame, but it doesn't stop there.

Sin's poisonous effects run further into the human bloodstream, and we see it in the breakdown of relationships. In short measure, we see that every aspect of perfect relationship God created Adam and Eve in, it is now broken by the fall. We begin with the impact on the relationship with the environment. So in verse 17 to 19, we have this scene, a continuing scene. Here is God, the all-wise judge, judge, and he comes, and he summons Adam and Eve to court. And this is the point where judgment falls on Adam. Verse 17, because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, cursed is the ground. Through painful toil you will eat. It will produce thorns and thistles.

[8:04] His sin was in the eating, and so his punishment becomes hardship and frustration in working and providing for food for himself and his family. That because of sin, the environment will both be his friend and his enemy. Some of us are gardeners. You may have experienced this in a small way this week. The spring sunshine has been wonderful, and it's caused the flowers to bloom, but it also brings the weeds. And so our relationship with the environment is damaged. And then there are the human relationships that we begin to see break down. At God's inquest, verse 9, the Lord God called to the man, where are you? And you get this wonderful picture of God the Creator. He's now God the Redeemer.

And what does God the Redeemer do? He seeks the lost to bring them to himself. And so he comes to bring Adam and Eve out of their hiding into honest confession. But what happens instead? How does Adam respond?

Verse 11, when God asks him, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree? The man said, the woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. Do you notice what he does? He's justifying himself. It was my circumstances, God. That was the cause. It was fate that led me to this point. And there's the blame shifting. It was really the woman that you put here. She's really responsible for leading me astray. And the accusation goes even further.

God, it's the woman you put here with me. You brought the trouble. So there's the justifying and the blame shifting that moves into the arguing and the bitterness within this first marriage.

[10:10] The last time we heard Adam speak, well, he wasn't really speaking at all. He was singing a wonderful love song in Genesis 2, 23. As he meets his wife, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

Now it's a very different way of talking about his wife. When God speaks to Eve, what is this you have done? She too passes the blame. The snake deceived me.

And as we get to verse 16 and as God's judgment comes on the woman, I will make your pains and 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. We hear something of the disruption that there will be in relationships. That even now the gift of bringing children into the world brings pain and suffering. That this marriage that God has created good now brings struggle.

There is this reminder of tension that the battle of the sexes. Here is a wife who's unwilling to submit to the husband's leading and here is a husband not leading in a loving and sacrificial way.

[11:27] And it comes because of sin. Sin is the hand grenade thrown into God's design for marriage and relationship and human community. And sadly, we don't need to look too far or think too back in our own experience to see some of its harmful effects. Those painful memories of fights that we have had with those closest to us. The unresolved conflict that we often have to live with. The abuse, the dishonor that we hear far too much of. But there is the breakdown of another relationship here in Genesis 3 and it's the relationship with God Himself. Genesis 3 verse 8, the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. So we've said this before that Eden was designed to be like a temple.

It was a holy place. It was the place where God and His people could meet together. And so here is this picture of God coming to meet with His people, but now because of sin, they run and they hide. Remember they bought into the lie, the lie of the evil one. So now they're thinking, does God really care about me? Does God really want my best? Does God really love me? Can I trust Him? And it's wonderful to see that even after the people sin, God comes. And notice in verse 8, He is still the Lord God. He is still the personal covenant-making God. And so because that is true, there is hope beyond human sin. But we need to understand that it's going to take God's work of seeking and saving for there to be any hope. Otherwise, we're left with fig leaves and trees and hiding and believing the lie about God. Why is it that so many people choose to worship created things rather than God the Creator? Why is it that we can be so quick in our hearts to attribute wrong motives to God? How is it that we can think the worst of God despite receiving His goodness and mercy and knowing the gospel? Again, it's the effect of sin in our hearts that leads to this breakdown.

And the climax of this breakdown and the tragic loss that the chapter closes with is exile.

Chapter 3, verse 22 to 24. So we saw that Adam and Eve, they took matters into their own hands.

They reached out for the forbidden fruit, saying to themselves, do you know what? I'm going to decide what is good and evil, what's right and wrong. I'm going to push God to one side.

But God takes something out of their hands. The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever.

[14:48] And do you know what? That's an act of God's mercy. If God were to leave us to live in rebellion forever, separated from, estranged from God, that would be misery. But God in His mercy says, I'm not going to allow people to live that way forever.

And so they are removed from the garden. There is that terrifying no entry sign fixed at the entrance, the flaming sword, the flaming sword, and the angels of judgment. And so we see them in exile.

They have lost the right to live in God's perfect presence, to live in God's perfect place, and to live there forever. And exile in the Bible becomes this image of judgment, of what it looks like to be far away from God and outside of communion and community with God.

And we see it when the people of Israel are in the promised land, enjoying God's goodness, but then they turn their back on God. Ultimately, the judgment is exile. They can no longer live in God's land. And it's striking when Jesus comes. Jesus, who so many people recognize as the most loving man who ever lived, that Jesus is also the person who spoke most in the Bible about the realities of hell and judgment. And it's striking how often the language that He uses is exile language. Think about those parables of people who are cast out, those people who are denied access into the King's presence, the reality of tears and torment for those on the outside. Picture of Genesis 3. We may have a bunch of if-onlys. If only there was a way back. If only there was a way to reverse all this. If only they hadn't done it in the first place.

But the good news that we find within Genesis 3 is that even when everything falls apart, God comes as the Redeemer for the lost. He comes to show us He is a God who brings grace. He is a God who writes a better story. So we've thought about the effects of sin. Now we need to think about the entry of God's grace together. And just to pull our minds back to Augustine and to recognize that God in His kindness, He doesn't want us to wander around in circles with a sense of despair.

[17:34] He doesn't want us not to be clear on where history is heading. He wants us to know that you and I, we can have hope because of the Christian view of history that's presented in the Bible.

Bible. And within Genesis 3 itself, there are wonderful gospel threads, wonderful themes. And what we're going to do is we're going to pull on three of these themes. And they will take us all the way to the story of Jesus as we encounter Him in the gospels, but they will take us right to the end of history and to the promise of new creation in Revelation. So the first of these threads we find in verse 21, and it's all about the clothing. Look at Genesis 3 verse 21, simple words, the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them. So in the beginning, without sin, made with nothing to hide physically or spiritually. But now sin has brought shame and disgrace. And we heard their best attempts to cover themselves with these fig leaves. And Genesis 3 highlights for us that as people, we lack the power to cover our sin and shame and bring the cleansing and honor we need. But the God of grace provides proper clothing. The God of love, He covers their dishonor and we discover a God whose grace can overcome our disgrace. Now how does He do that? What is needed for shame to be covered? Well it's here in the clothing. It's garments of skin. Blood sacrifice must be made for sin and shame for sin and shame to be covered, for us to be clothed. Significantly it's the same idea in the temple. God established very elaborate clothing for the priests to make. That covering, that clothing was provided by God. And as the priests were to serve in the temple, they must themselves be sprinkled, even their clothing must be sprinkled with blood. And that sounds really gruesome, but it's really significant. Because it was a message to the priests and the people, and it's a message for us that we cannot approach God unless we are clothed with His righteousness. Unless there is a blood sacrifice to cover our sin and our shame. And that takes us directly, doesn't it, to the message of the gospel.

It takes us to Jesus on the cross. It takes us to Jesus stripped and dying in shame so that, by God's grace, your sin and mine can be forgiven. That we can know honor in place of dishonor. That there might be grace to overcome our disgrace. That by faith, as a gift of God, we are clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. That's how God sees us, perfect in His Son, the Lord Jesus. That's how we can draw near. So when we read in Revelation of the wedding and of the bride's clothes and of the white robes, and you read about them again in Revelation 19, those white robes are saying to us, in the new creation, all sin is cleansed and forgiven and removed, and shame is gone, and it's gone forever.

So the Bible promises that human shame, human sin can be met by God's grace through the sacrifice He provides.

And so it's an invitation to us to trust in Jesus. Let's pull on our next gospel thread. And this takes us to the walk. The walk of God, or the God of the walk. Remember verse 8?

[21:48] The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden. To walk with someone, to have a walk with someone, most often involves some quality time, doesn't it? Involves being side by side with someone else, it becomes a picture of relationship, of friendship, of intimacy.

And the story of the Bible is of our Creator God walking with His people. Here in this perfect garden, He established perfect relationship, perfect friendship. But even after the entry of sin, God's coming to walk in the garden, where Adam and Eve were, it gives us hope. God comes on the walk, and He calls out to Adam, where are you? This isn't because of ignorance on God's part. This is God, the loving Father, who wants His child to confess, to bring His wrongdoing into the open.

So that at the same time that God will send out Adam and Eve from the garden, they are banished. We are still reminded that He is the God of covenant love, who will make a way to walk with His people. And that theme picks up. It picks up in the story of Abraham. It picks up in the story of Moses and of the people of Israel. There is God right there with His people in the heart of the camp. And the climax of that great theme, of course, is none other than the Lord Jesus. Here is the Son of God who literally walks among us. He has come and He has walked in our shoes, and He has walked on this earth on His kingdom mission. He has walked among rich and poor, men and women, clean and unclean. He has walked up a mountain, and He has shone with the glory of God. And He has walked up Mount Calvary to die on a Roman cross. And He would walk out of the tomb in victory. And the wonderful thing is that the God of the walk still walks with His people today, because Jesus has sent the Spirit to live among us. And in the new creation, what do we discover?

[24:11] We discover the great hope that is held out to us in the good news of the Bible is that we will once again walk with our God and our Savior forever in a beautiful, physical, redeemed creation.

We discover a God and Savior who comes so close as to wipe away every tear. And so the answer to our loneliness and our isolation, the answer to the reality of God feeling far from us, is of God graciously coming to us, of God calling to us in the Lord Jesus.

It's of the Lord God walking the road to the cross in order to forgive and to save us. There's one more thread that we need to pull on, and it's the thread of the sword and the tree.

It's there at the end of Genesis 3. What does that flaming sword that guards the garden represent? It represents God's holy judgment on sin. It bars the way back into His presence, so the access to the tree of life is now forbidden.

Verse 19, we heard those words to Adam, For dust you are, and to dust you will return.

[25:43] Now the access to the tree of life is forbidden. Every death, every funeral reminds us of this dust-to-dust reality and leaves us with a longing as we read this.

Is there a way back to life? Is there a way back to life in a perfect world? Is there a way for relationships to be restored? Is there a way back to life with God Himself?

And is there a way back to the tree of life? And to find that answer, the Bible invites us again to go to another tree, to go to that wooden cross upon which Jesus died, and to ask ourselves the question, What is happening there?

And what's happening there is that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, He cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He feels as if He is in exile. He endures spiritual agony. He tastes death as judgment. And in that moment, on that tree, Jesus Himself, the Son of God, goes under the flaming sword of God's judgment, so that by His grace and through faith, the way of access to God is open once more.

[27:08] And the great signal to that was that when Jesus died down in the temple, the curtain was torn from top to bottom. God is doing it through the death and then the resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

He is opening the way back to God and the way back to life. God is beckoning us back into His glorious presence as we would trust in Him. Jesus tastes death so we can once more eat from the tree of life.

We heard it in that picture of the future, that picture of life in the new creation. As we heard from Revelation 21 and 22, the new creation, it's like a temple.

And it's like a garden. And it's like a city. And it's a place of life. And it's a place of perfection. And it's a place of God and His people together forever.

And it reminds us that the effects of sin, they do not have the last word. That is not the end of the story. Instead, God's grace brings us the joy of life with God now and the promise of life for all eternity.

[28:25] Listen in once again to Revelation 22. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing down from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great tree of the city, street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

There is a way back to life with God. There is a way back to life with God.

There is access once again to the tree of life, to eternal life, to perfect life, the life that we were made for. And it comes through faith in the Lord Jesus.