

Genesis 3 "Meet the Redeeming God"

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we do pray for your help. We always need your help. Every moment, every day. Amen. We are especially needy as we come to your word and seek to know it and understand it, to see it cut to our hearts, that it would shape us and mold us as you would have it.

And so we ask that you would speak this morning as we look to your word. In Jesus' name, amen. Last Sunday, I had the privilege of preaching in Memphis as the church that I grew up in celebrates its 50th anniversary, 50 years as a church.

And looking back 50 years to remember God's faithfulness is really neat. But God has been faithful a lot longer than 50 years. He's been a God of redemption since before He created the world.

[1:26] That's who He is. Looking back to the Old Testament even to see His character on display generation after generation is a beautiful reminder to us of who God has always been and who He continues to be today and in our lives.

So this summer, we're going to do that for a few weeks to look at what we will call redemption stories in the Old Testament. You can see a couple of them up there.

You might be able to figure out which ones they are. He's been working to redeem for thousands and thousands of years. And some pastors and churches these days are critiquing the Old Testament.

They're fearful of the wrathful God that we will find there and not like and be turned off by. But we will see there a God who is indeed holy and who is and has always been all about redemption, full of grace.

So that's going to expand our vision of God's greatness, of His love. That vision we have that Paul tells us in Ephesians is the one thing that is absolutely essential essential to us being the people in the church God has called us to be.

[2:46] That we would have a glorious vision of God, of His great love for us. And as we look back to the Old Testament, it's going to expand that vision that we have.

That we might love God as we should. That we might be used of Him to transform Huntsville and the world. We need that vision. I love being able to go to the Old Testament for that.

One other reason that we pastors wanted to spend some time in the Old Testament this summer besides the fact that we've been in Luke for 17 years, not that long, just a couple of years.

We're almost finished, by the way. Many of these great stories are stories that we and our kids know and love. And so we get a chance as we look at some of these Sunday school stories and some others to understand stories that we love in the context of the big story.

God's big story. So that's an opportunity we'll have all through this summer. This morning we're going to start near the beginning of God's big story with a familiar episode.

[3:52] The story of Adam and Eve. A serpent. Forbidden fruit. The fallout of the first sin as they rebel against the Holy Creator.

Is there redemption there in that story? Absolutely. Because God is here and that's who He is. Read with me in Genesis chapter 3 the whole story and then we'll look back at parts of it together.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

[4:58] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate.

And the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done? And the woman said, The serpent deceived me and I ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field.

[6:11] On your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken. For you are dust. And to dust you shall return. The man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living.

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, Behold the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

[7:21] Now lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

He drove out the man and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Thus far God's holy, inerrant, infallible word for which we give him great thanks. It was a really hot August day that I first learned a lot about my offensive line coach in high school.

I was a freshman on the football team. It was the first time through two-a-day practices. It was sweltering out there. I didn't know what it would feel like. And I watched as one of the upperclassmen tried to block his own way, the way he wanted to do it rather than the way that the coach had taught us.

And he ended up face first on the ground. He could have gotten seriously injured trying to do it his own way. And to remind him of that, he got a metal visor clip from my coach on the back of his helmet.

[8:37] And the way he reacted, wincing in pain as the ringing in his ears, I said, I never want that ringing in my ears. I'm sure of that. But then he decided to talk back to the coach.

And he got sent in full pads, all of his football gear, to run up and down the steep hill up to the locker room for the rest of practice.

Dripping with sweat, you can imagine he didn't run too long. Pretty soon he was crawling up the hill and almost rolling down it.

I knew, as I watched this develop, that coach took quite seriously both blocking your own way and the dangers that come with that and disrespecting his authority.

Adam and Eve had been promised that disobeying God would have frightful consequences. And man's first sin here, determining to distrust his good creator and insist on his own way, indeed receives God's just punishment.

[9:51] We learn right away about God that he takes sin quite seriously, don't we? I mean, just look at how this develops for a second in this passage.

Satan, having inhabited the serpent, begins to cast doubt on the word of God. Did God really say? Are you sure? But beyond that, he casts doubt on the character of God. Can God really be trusted? Does he really have your best in mind? Is he really good? Y'all, what a monstrous evil.

Right? Can you imagine this? This God who has just created this glorious, good world and put Adam and Eve in the midst of it and said, here's everything you need.

[10:50] Eat fruit from all these trees. Look at all these animals. And I'm going to walk and talk with you every day with me. And evil suggests that he might not be good.

Evil questions his goodness? Preposterous! No way will they buy that. I mean, we would never. But Eve begins to wonder, doesn't she? And soon, Adam and Eve decide to try their own way rather than God's.

It may seem astounding, but we still try to handle relationships and our marriages our own way rather than God's, don't we? We try to handle our bodies and our sexuality our own way rather than God's.

We try to handle our money, our time, our priorities, our own way rather than God's. And it's dangerous to us.

[12:02] And God knows that. The Creator's just judgment is severe. The man and woman must not be left to think that they can find life their own way.

It's not true. And so God pronounces curses on all of creation. In fact, right on the places they hurt the most. Adam and Eve were created to reflect God's image by filling and subduing the earth. Two things He told them to do. Now, filling will be hard and painful. Pain and childbirth. Now, subduing will be hard and painful.

Thorns, thistles, a cursed ground. But it gets worse. As you read through the rest of the story, what happens to Adam and Eve?

Banishment from God's presence, right? Their closest friend. Out of the garden. Sent away. And the spiritual and eventually physical death that they'd been promised if they disobeyed.

[13:12] all the good creation broken. Those around you hurt by your failure. Can you imagine for a minute the guilt and shame that Adam and Eve must have felt as that sunk in?

As they experienced the Holy Creator pronouncing these curses, sending them away. How did we get taken in by that? We've blown it and we can't fix it.

Have you felt the shame of sin and failure? Kids, have you felt so embarrassed or ashamed at disobeying your parents?

At something you've looked at? At something you've said? the first audience of the book of Genesis had felt this.

That the Exodus generation that God had just brought out of Egypt now they're wandering in the wilderness. Why? Because they didn't trust God.

[14:24] And they doubted Him and insisted on their own way didn't they? And so here they are wandering and perhaps wondering how will this God respond?

What's He like anyway? And they learn that He does take sin seriously don't they? They're tasting that when they get this story from Moses.

But is that the end of the story? Is that all there is? See all the other gods that they've heard about in Egypt and the other nations around them those other gods are like that?

They take sin seriously. They're terrifying. Retributive. You need to watch out or they'll get you. Is Yahweh any different?

Is there any hope for us in our failure now that we've blown it? Maybe you're wondering that this morning.

[15:28] Here's the good news God's of this story. In the midst of our failures which are huge. The holy creator and He is holy and He takes sin very seriously He is also our gracious redeemer.

And this makes all the difference y'all. There's no other God like this. Look at how we see God's character on display here. How do we and the Israelites learn about a redeeming God who gives failures hope?

Well it starts with a question. Where are you? Nearly every day when I get home from work my five-year-old Lily runs and hides away from me.

That's kind of a thing. It's a game right? Except that I know where she is. Invariably Lily has run up to her bed and hidden herself under a blanket creating an unmistakable lump in the exact shape of a five-year-old little girl.

It's hard to miss. But she hides there and I walk up the stairs and I say Lily where are you? Now I know where Lily is.

[16:52] But I I ask where are you? And so she gets engaged, right? She can make noises to give me hints or usually she just starts giggling underneath the blanket so now it's a moving lump even easier to spot.

And I say where are you? Not to get an answer but to get her engagement because I love her and being in relationship with her, right? If I know where Lily is under her blanket, do you think God, the Creator knew where Adam was behind his fig leaves?

Yeah. Yes he did. And yet he says, where are you? Here comes God on his daily walk in the garden as he always does.

Used to being with the man and the woman in intimate relationship. He loves them, doesn't he? He comes to walk with them. And yet today they're not running out to greet him.

They're hiding, aren't they? Verse 7, they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths and they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden.

[18:07] They knew that sound. He always came to walk with them in the cool of the day and the man and his wife did what? Hid themselves. from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

And the first question that God asks in the Bible's whole story, it's not, what were you thinking? It's not, how could you possibly?

What's the first thing he asks? Where are you? God's not looking for information. God's pursuing Adam in his guilt and shame to engage him in relationship because he loves him and being in relationship with him.

A pastor friend of mine recently said to me that God asks fallen man here, where are you? And we are still avoiding that question and hiding from him.

We love to hide, don't we? Adam says he was ashamed and afraid and so he hid. He didn't run out and throw himself at God's feet and say, oh father, I'm right here, I'm feeling the pain of my mistakes, the embarrassment of my failures, I need you desperately, here I am.

[19:31] No, he went to the fig leaves. Man, I get that. He'd really blown it. Big time failure, genuine guilt and when I feel that, my instinct is to hide.

Don't let anybody know. Some of you hide the way that I often do, behind busyness. Just so no one can know where my heart really is.

I'll be really busy, I'll avoid God's word, avoid prayer, just let's do a lot. Nobody will really know what's going on. Maybe you hide by not telling your parents what's really going on.

Maybe you hide behind blame shifting like Adam. This woman, you gave me. It's always someone else's fault, right? Plenty of people to blame.

Maybe you hide behind alcohol, behind religiosity, being a good person, behind humor, behind intellect, telling yourself as you hide that no one, not even God, really knows you.

[20:46] We all have our favorite hiding spots, don't we? And of course, they're fig leaves. God sees right through us.

He knows where we are, but we hide. Maybe you're hiding this morning. God says, where are you? This won't sound like good news, perhaps, if you're hiding from Him, but it is. No matter how good you are at hiding, your father is even better at seeking.

It's not even like the odds of me finding Lily under her blanket. He's way better at seeking than we are at hiding. He pursues you because He loves you.

And that's good news because God makes a promise that He's not coming merely to shame us and punish us. He's seeking us for our good, to redeem what once was lost.

[21:52] God pledges to remove our guilt and shame. Isn't it remarkable that the first promise in the Bible comes in this passage?

The one where we blow it and the Creator King has just been spurned by His creatures, rebellion is rampant, here come the curses, and the verse that Christians since the first century have referred to as the Proto-Evangelium, the first promise of the gospel comes in the midst of God pronouncing curses.

Verse 15, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

What's God saying? I haven't given up on these failures. sinners. There's a singular person coming from this disobedient woman who will bring hope.

There's a child I'll send who will defeat the serpent once and for all. Listen to this promise, y'all.

Right at the low point in the story, right?

[23:18] There's a certainty that evil will lose. that your arch enemies will be defeated, that Satan will be crushed and all creation will be redeemed.

That's what God's saying. Adam and Eve, don't lose hope in your failure. Israelites wandering in the wilderness, don't lose hope in your failure.

Southwood, dear friends, don't lose hope in your failure. The one true God is a redeeming God.

That's the unchanging nature of his character. That's who he is. Do you want to know how gracious your father is? Yes?

Yes, you do want to know? See, ask me, right? How gracious is he? Okay, can you ask me that?

One, two, three. How gracious is he? That was really good, all talking during the sermon.

[24:22] Even in the midst of meeting out justice, he oozes out grace, doesn't he? Even in the face of our greatest rebellion, he promises redemption.

Even to the most guilty and the most ashamed, he brings hope. Even to those facing certain death, he brings life, eternal life.

He's so good. He's so gracious. That's who he is. But the redemption story gets even more beautiful.

Before they're sent out of the garden because of their sin, God doesn't just speak hope. He begins to act to cover our guilt and shame.

I don't want to overlay the sacrifice imagery here, but it's almost certain that we see the first example of an animal having to die so a person could be covered.

[25:25] Look at verse 21. The Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

This probably means there was an animal sacrificed, but it definitely means that God demonstrates tangibly that he's continuing to care for Adam and Eve even better than they could care for themselves, right?

No fig leaves, garments of skin. He hasn't abandoned them even when they've sought to abandon him. He offers protection, covering for their shame much better than their fig leaves.

This time, God himself does the covering, doesn't he? God. And in that sense, at least, we get a taste already of the redeeming grace of God that we know most fully in Jesus.

Covering Adam and Eve with animal skins is only the beginning of what God's going to do, of his care for his rebellious people. In Jesus, God provides not merely a second chance for failures who would blow that second chance anyway, but a second Adam, one who comes and who when he is tempted to doubt God's word and God's good character, he does what?

[26:52] He trusts his father. He obeys the father. He succeeds where Adam has failed and where we have failed.

And yet, even though he's the successful one, the one who doesn't give in to temptation, he does actually go to the cross, doesn't he? He goes to the cross to die where we deserve to.

Galatians 3 actually says it this way, he redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it's written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

Jesus takes the curse so that we receive the blessing he earned. That's why we sang in that great hymn, the beginning of the service. He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. Where's the curse in this story? It's on creation, it's on you, it's on me, it's everywhere and Jesus comes to make blessing flow everywhere.

[28:01] That's why we rejoice. That's why we have hope. For failures buried beneath their guilt and their shame. Jesus sacrifices himself to be a covering for us.

Hebrews chapter 10 says it this way, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. He crushes the head of the serpent, defeats all his and our enemies, and by his one sacrifice covers us safely forever.

Verse 17 keeps going. I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

No more sacrifice needed for your sin. It is finished. His was enough. No matter how shameful your failure, no matter how big your sin, his death covers you.

[29:22] What's God like when you fail? Can you answer that a little bit better now? He pursues you to draw you out of hiding into a relationship with him.

He promises hope at your lowest and darkest moments. He takes action to provide what you need. He's always been that way.

He always will be. It's who he is. It's the first glimpse of his redeeming nature in this story, but there are many, many more preparing us for the ultimate redemption we find in Jesus.

Yahweh is the king of creation who rules justly and firmly and living your own way rather than his is dangerous to your soul.

So take heed. Don't trust yourself. And at the same time, he loves to redeem. So take comfort and trust him.

[30:30] I said I learned a lot about my coach that really hot August day. I did. I actually came to realize I could trust my coach, that he really loved me.

Coach would eventually say encouraging things. He would pray for us before every game. God, take care of my guys. And so he would demonstrate his love.

But I knew by the end of that first practice I could trust him. By the end of practice that day, I saw what he was like having been disregarded, having been disrespected.

He went and walked over to that hill where of course the player is now crawling up the hill. And my coach, who is not a small man himself, got down on his hands and knees beside him and started crawling up the hill.

Shouting encouragement to the guy next to him. Come on, you can do it. You can do it. Keep coming. Of course, my coach beat him up the hill because it was his first trip. He got up to the top and he turned around and reached down, grabbed the guy by the arm and pulled him up to stand next to him and threw his arms around his big sweaty, stinky self and hugged him.

[31:50] And I thought, I can trust him. He does love us. I don't want to blow it, but he's the one I want around when I do.

Y'all, God has entered into our sin. He has suffered for us and given us not just a hand up but an eternal security, a righteous standing with him, a new family when we deserved none of it.

there's no other God like him. No one else meets you in your failure to bring you hope and redemption. Everyone and all of creation needs to know about a God who redeems like that.

Amen? Let's pray. Father, we need to know that because we forget. we fail and we forget that you still love us and that you're more gracious and merciful than we believe.

Thank you for giving us a reminder of that this morning, a picture of your redeeming nature, how you love to rescue us in the midst of our failure.

[33:13] Would you so excite us by that that we might long for the world to know for everyone and every part of this creation to be touched by the God who rules over it all and who redeems so gloriously.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you.