

Paradise Lost

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Genesis chapter 3, I'm going to begin reading in verse 8. Genesis chapter 3, verse 8.

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.

And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?

[1 : 13] The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit and I ate. Then 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.

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 contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.

[2 : 25] 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, knowing good and evil.

[3 : 32] 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 of the garden 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.

May God bless the hearing and preaching of his word. You know, we often wonder, why do bad, why do people do bad things?

What drives badness? If we could say it that way, where does evil come from? Since the beginning of a time, history gives us lessons, and one of the most important lessons of the past that we must not forget are the dangers of communism.

In one form or another, in the 20th century alone, communism led to deaths of over 100 million people worldwide. An estimated 60 million people died in communist Russia alone in mass execution, widespread famine, forced population relocation, and the torturous labor camps.

[5 : 06] The gulag, the labor camps set up under Lenin and reached their peak under Stalin, were for political prisoners, for those who failed to comply with the communist state.

These camps were the location of arguably the worst human torture ever conceived by the mind of man.

The best of circumstances, prisoners were kept from sleep, food, and drink for a week or so, or just beaten to a bloody pulp. And the worst, they had their heads squeezed with iron rings.

They were lowered into baths of boiling acid. They were stripped, tied down, and left to be bitten by fire ants and bed bugs, and so much more that would be inappropriate.

How could a people be so wicked? How could a people commit such heinous acts against their own people? Against people creating the image of God?

[6 : 07] As a young child growing up in communist Russia, author Alexander Solzhenitsyn says, A number of older folks used to say, men have forgotten God. That's why all this happened.

Near the end of his life, he says, I have, after passing through the gulag himself, I have spent over 50 years working on the history of our Russian Revolution.

In the process, I've read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by the upheaval.

The gulag acapellago is his famous work describing the gulag. Three volumes, I believe. But if I were asked to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat, men have forgotten God.

That's why all this happened. We forget God. Bad things happen. In so many ways, the problem of sin is the forgetting of God, the forgetting of his goodness, love, and grace, so much so that we take matters into our own hands to secure what we don't think he'll provide.

[7 : 36] That's what we saw last week with Adam and Eve. The lie of the serpent caused them to doubt, distrust, and disown what they knew about God. That's what we see so often in our own lives.

We don't turn from God and run away from him for the fun of it. Most often, we turn from him and go our own way because we concluded he no longer cares.

We forget him. What we need, therefore, is not merely an understanding of sin that we heard about last week. What we need is a right understanding of God. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, You will never make yourself feel that you are a sinner because there's a mechanism in you as a result of sin that will always be defending you against every accusation.

We are all on very good terms with ourselves. That's something we can all agree upon today. We're all on very good terms with ourselves, and we can always put up a good case for ourselves.

Even if we try to make ourselves feel that we are sinners, we'll never do it. There's only one way to know that we're sinners, and that is to have some dim, glimmering conception of God.

[8 : 50] After the fall of sin, Genesis 3 details the wreckage of sin among men and women and all of creation. But threading through this wreckage is a glimmering conception of God.

Genesis 3 invites us to see not merely sin's wreckage, but the gracious God who comes to us, calls to us, and promises to rescue us from sin.

The main point we're going at is the only appropriate response to the unimaginable wreckage of sin is turning in humility to God. The only appropriate response to the unimaginable wreckage of sin is turning in humility to God.

So we're going to break this out in three points. The first is sin is worse than imagined. Sin is worse than imagined. If you remember last week, immediately after the eyes of Adam and Eve are opened, they realize they're naked and they're no longer unashamed.

They are ashamed and they run to hide. In so many ways, Genesis 3, 1 through 7 is what they did, what happened.

[9 : 52] And 8 through 24 is God's response. So that's what we're tuning in for. The scene suddenly shifts to the Lord God walking in the midst of the garden.

If you notice, Lord God was in in verse 1, then it returns in verse 8, and then it continues to the rest of the chapter. Because this is about what God is doing and how God responds.

And so he comes to them walking in the garden in the cool of the day as the sun is setting and the breeze comes. And the man and the woman hide themselves from the presence of the Lord.

Reminded of Psalm 139. There's nowhere you can go to hide yourself from the presence of the Lord. But I find it striking. The first thing that the man and the woman hear is the sound of the Lord walking.

To find them. But as he approaches, they run and hide. They've already covered themselves with fig leaves to hide from one another. But now they hide in the trees from God.

[10 : 55] Sin always separates what God joins together. We saw how sin separated them from one another. They were naked and unashamed. Suddenly they're naked, covered with shame. But now we see how sin separates them from God.

They hide from God. We immediately see that sin is worse than imagined. It came. It was a baited hook telling them this is the way to be free.

This is the life you want. They thought sin was just breaking some arbitrary rule, eating the forbidden food. But immediately the consequences of sin is separation from God.

They immediately begin to hide. But why? Why are they? This God has done nothing worthy of hiding.

But why are they hiding? Look in verse 10. She says, I heard the sound of you. And I was afraid.

[11 : 55] Because I was naked and I hid myself. The most repeated command in the Bible is do not fear.

But this is the first reference to fear in the whole Bible. That wicked doubt that creeps into our hearts and brings so much uncertainty to all of our life.

It was never there before this serpent. And suddenly it drives her away from the gracious God who made her. They're afraid and hide because they suddenly realize they're no longer innocent or blameless.

Like a preschooler who runs to hide after eating a cookie before dinner. They hide because they realize they're guilty.

An invisible guilt that they never thought could invade has now intruded their relationship with God. They try to cover themselves with lies.

[12 : 57] I think that's what's going on in so many ways. The woman you gave me. She made me sin. Just making excuses like far too many men after him. Adam says, it was that woman.

But in actuality they're hiding because they're guilty. They know instinctively because of the way God has made them. The Lord dwells in unapproachable light.

In him is no darkness at all. His eyes are too pure to look on evil or tolerate any wrongdoing. They know they don't belong in the presence of this God. But it wasn't always this way.

They were created in the image of God to live in personal relationship with him. To know him. To commune with him. To use their words. To relate to him.

To exalt him. To celebrate him. And yet that relationship that was so precious. Unlike any other creature made by the Lord God. God is suddenly and completely lost.

[13 : 59] That's what's going on. Suddenly and completely lost.

But after their fall the pages of scripture tell us. Again and again. That sin is worse than we imagine as well. We think of sin as I said last week.

As a little more than a misstep, mistake or a missing of the mark. But these verses alert us to the reality that from Adam we inherit guilt. Adam is the firstborn of our race.

The human race. He is our father. He is our representative. When he sins. The guilt of his sin. Not only comes upon him. But upon the whole human race.

That's the way the Bible describes it. As our father. Romans 5. Look there with me. He says just as sin came into the world through one man.

[15 : 00] That's Adam. And death through sin. So death spreads to all men. Because all sinned. Sin comes through one man. And death spreads to all men.

Because all sinned in him. John Piper helps us. The problem with the human race is not most deeply therefore. That everybody does various kinds of sins. Those sins are real.

They're huge. They're enough to condemn us. But the deepest problem. Is that behind all our depravity. And all our guilt.

And all our sinning. There's a mysterious connection with Adam's. Whose sin became our sin. And whose judgment became our judgment. What it's helping us to see.

Is that our problem is therefore not most deeply that we sin. But that all who come after Adam. Stand guilty before God. And in need of a mediator. Sin brings forth death.

[15 : 57] Death spreads to all mankind. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15. In Adam all die. In Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth.

After helping her husband with the murders of Duncan and Banquo. Lady Macbeth's mind breaks into the guilt and shame of what she's done. She sees spots of blood on her hands.

She washes them constantly. And cannot get it off. And she just says out. Damn spot. Who would have known that man could have so much blood.

Well the truth is the human race stands right there with her. We are born in sin. Guilty because of sin. Captive to sin. Unable to free ourselves from sin.

No amount of washing. No amount of working. No amount of praying. No amount of beating ourselves up. Can remove the stain of this guilt. Sin is far worse than we can imagine.

[17 : 00] But notice how God responds in their guilt. God goes to them and finally God's walking in the cool of the day. Because he's going to find them.

He comes with a string of questions. Where are you? Have you? Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree?

See these string of questions are not because the Lord doesn't realize what's going on. The all-knowing God didn't miss anything. These string of questions are also not because the Lord wants to summon them in for punishment.

He's not trying to find them so that he can make them pay or bring them in. That's not what the Lord is doing. The string of questions is because the Lord wants them to turn to him.

These questions are designed not to drive them out of hiding, but to draw them out of hiding. If God wanted to drive them out, he would have said, what have you done?

[18 : 04] Why did you eat the fruit? How in the world could you eat the fruit after all I've done? But God says, where are you? Where are you?

Who told you you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you? I couldn't help but ponder whether the questions I ask my children are to drive them from hiding or to draw them out.

Are they more like, what happened, man? Did you stumble? Why are you so angry? Are they more like, how could you do this?

You know what our family believes. What you got to see is these questions are all grace. He's drawing them out. Because he wants them to confess.

And gradually they do. God could have flushed the world down after the man and woman rebelled, but he doesn't. He searches them and he finds them. He comes to them.

[19 : 11] The rescue mission of God doesn't begin when Jesus Christ enters this world. The rescue mission of God begins right here. He doesn't ask for an explanation. He doesn't say, answer for what you've done.

He doesn't ask for a payment to make things right. He wants them to confess. He just says, I just want you to return to me. I just want you to play it straight.

I want you to give me your heart again. So much of the Bible falls into place. The God of the Bible is not interested in you cleaning yourself up. Not interested in you making amends, resolutions, offering sacrifices.

He's interested in you giving him your heart. Joel 2 says it well that God says so many other places. Even now, to a people that just continually stumbles into idolatry and sin, a people much like us, declares the Lord, return to me.

Go search that word. How many times return occurs in the prophets? I counted like 15 times in Jeremiah. My reading this week, return to me with all your heart. That might have been an exaggeration, but you know, preachers do that from time to time.

[20 : 20] But it's in there, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments. What he's saying is, your salvation is not secured by your moral renovations, your moral changes.

Rend your hearts. That's what I want. Return to the Lord your God, for his gracious and merciless, slow to anger, bounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

Two, sin's effects are greater than we imagine. So sin is worse than we imagine. Sin's effects are greater than we imagine. Calvin and Hobbes have provided some of the most enjoyable and insightful cartoons over the years.

One particular cartoon captures the spirit of our age very well. It's mostly Calvin pontificating, talking aloud to his friend Tiger Hobbes.

They're walking along and Calvin says, nothing I do is my fault. Sounds like something I would say or think. The next frame shows Hobbes scratching his whiskers as Calvin says, My family is dysfunctional, and my parents won't empower me.

[21 : 41] Consequently, I'm not self-actualized. Then we see Calvin, eyes shut, arms crossed, doing a poor me pose. My behavior is addictive functioning in a disease process of toxic codependency.

I need holistic healing and wellness before I'll set any responsibility for my action. Hobbes responds, the tiger, one of us needs to stick his head in a bucket of ice water.

The strip ends with Calvin saying, I love the culture of victimhood. Sadly, the comic strip is not too far off.

The spirit of our age continually says what's wrong with the world is evil, disorder, mental health, environment, abuse, victimhood. So much so that after the murders in Nashville, two days later, we're talking about the victim who's really the perpetrator of these heinous evils.

I'm not saying she didn't have a hard life or had something. I'm not saying there was nothing hard for her, but she was the perpetrator. We begin to praise her and protect her reputation.

[22 : 51] Genesis 3 includes nothing about victimhood, but it does carefully unpack the reality of sin's effects. They're greater than we can imagine. The scene shifts from the Lord God. So the Lord God is asking questions in 8 through 13, but in 14 through 19, the Lord God is speaking.

Now, these are not commandments. The Lord's not saying obey these commands. The Lord is stating the reality of the new world, the world post-fall, the world under the shadow of the fall.

And these verses unpack at least four effects of sin that are greater than imagined. First, conflict. The Lord curses the snake and the devil. 14 says, cursed are you above all livestock.

You're so crafty above all livestock. Well, cursed are you above all of them. On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. Now, did snakes always crawl?

That's the immediate question there. They used to walk around. Who knows? But from now on, they crawl. Bowing and crawling in the dust is an act of humbling oneself, because the snake sought to exalt itself above God.

[24 : 01] God curses the snake to crawl on his belly for the rest of his life to show humiliation for God whether he wants to or not. But the Lord God does not just curse the snake, he curses the devil.

In verse 15, I'll put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. Inmity, enmity, conflict between the children of the woman and the children of the devil.

Does this mean that all human beings are like Indiana Jones who hate snakes? I think, yes. I think that's woven into the way the world is. We should hate these creatures.

But there's so much more going on here. Much like dark clouds gather before a coming storm, these words declare that hatred, hostility, and conflict between God's people and those who follow the evil one will continue from now on.

What the Lord is saying, there's a battle between good and evil, light and darkness, the living God and the God of this world, which is the Satan, from now on.

[25 : 14] The true children of the woman are those who follow the Lord, but the children of the devil are those who turn against him. So much so that our Lord said in John 8, if you love me, you would follow me.

You would hear my voice, but you don't love me and follow me because you are of your father, the devil. Devil, Ephesians 3, is the ringleader, the prince of the power of the air that is leading many astray.

And causing conflict with the people of God. Two, well, there's first conflict. There's also corruption. Sin brings about disordered desires.

Sin brings about internal corruption. The marriage relationship is what we see immediately spoiled by this internal corruption. Look at verse 16b.

B, he says, your desire shall be contrary to your husband and he shall rule over you. We have spoken several times throughout this series that there was an order that God established in the marriage relationship.

[26 : 24] So this is a change of the order, but showing a disorder in that ordered relationship where the husband is ahead of the home and the wife is called to submit to him in appropriate ways.

Never in sin. Da-da-da-da-da. But it's showing immediately that the first thing that the serpent does is bring disorder into this relationship. This one flesh relationship.

At her worst, the woman's desires will be contrary to her husband. Her desire will be to oppose him, undermine him, oust him, to usurp him as the head of the home.

That's what that is talking about. Genesis 4-9, or 4-7, uses the same word in reference to sin.

And so we know this contrary desire is a sinful desire. At her worst, at his worst, the man's desire will be to rule his wife. It's not a good rule spoken of here, but a controlling, mastering, dominating rule.

[27 : 21] The marriage relationship, once marked by love and order and unity, is suddenly marred by competition, disorder, and conflict. To love and cherish becomes to usurp and dominate.

But where do these desires come from? This corruption comes from the heart. Sin is not dirt we need to wash off or a personality quirk we need to manage.

It's inherited and ingrained corruption that traces through our heart. This truth is repeated throughout Scripture. The heart is deceitful above all things.

Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17, in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 6, all are dead and trespasses and sins.

Ephesians 2, our Lord. The Lord said, in one of the many conflict he had with the self-righteous Pharisees, who said, you've got to wash your hands before you eat at this table.

[28 : 24] The Lord says, it's not what goes in that defiles a man. It's what comes out. Which totally changes the understanding of the law.

The law was not meant to merely reform the outward behavior. The law was meant to be a parable of what must happen to the heart. But they had stripped it from the grace of God and the demand for a reformed heart.

And so, Jesus confronts them and says, That's what comes from your heart. That's what comes from your heart.

All this means, as Sproul has helpfully said. We're not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we're sinners.

The problem with humanity is not that we do various sins. We have a corrupt heart. All you have to do is have children. And you discover this.

[29 : 40] In our house, we had this little speaker that I think is the first thing that we saw, kind of the rebellion, maybe at the changing table. You say, lay flat.

And they start to arch their back and kick at you. Yeah, you know. There's an active heart in there. But I remember talking. They weren't allowed to touch the speaker. They weren't allowed to turn it on, unplug it. I don't know.

They had to force to unplug it. But like, don't go touch that speaker. And then, you know, you turn around for two seconds. They think they're so swift and sly.

And they're crawling to the speaker. You know, that's the way our hearts are. Give me a rule. It's like that sign of wet paint. I'm going to break it. The important thing we can do for our children is not to keep them safe and pure.

It's a good way to create self-righteous legalists. Most important thing we can do for our children is teach them about the corruption of their heart and their need for a Savior. J.C. Ryle, his book, Holiness, helpfully says, the fairest babe, maybe this is for some of our ladies that had a baby in the last couple of weeks.

[30 : 45] The fairest babe, the most beautiful babe that has entered life this year and become the sunbeam of the family, is not, as its mother perhaps fondly calls it, a little angel, a little innocent, but a little sinner.

Alas, it lies smiling and crowing in its cradle. That little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness. I think Ryle is wanting us to laugh a little bit at that.

But he continues, of all the foolish things that parents say about their children, there is one worse than the common saying, there's none worse than the common saying, my son has a good heart at the bottom. He's not what he ought to be, but he has fallen into bad hands.

Public schools are bad places. The tutors neglect the boys, yet he has a good heart at the bottom. The truth unhappily is diametrically the other way.

He's so opposed to that. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy's own heart and not in the school. Not in the environment.

[31 : 55] Which psychologists continually argue. The first cause is in the corruption of the boy's heart. Pain enters the world.

The fundamental way in which woman participates in the calling to fill the earth and subdue it is the bearing and raising of children. And that task becomes more painful.

I will multiply your pain and childbearing. In pain, you shall bring forth children. Praise God for the epidural.

What do you mean multiply? Well, we don't know how great childbirth was before. I know it's pretty intense now, but from secondhand information.

But life is painful. Life's painful for the man as well.

[32 : 56] Look in verse 16. Because you listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree, which I commanded you not. Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain, you shall eat of it.

Thorns and thistles pointing to pain. It shall bring forth for you. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread. Once the garden was watered by the Lord's own decree and just seems like stuff just shot out of the ground, well, suddenly pain is what's going to mark the work of the man.

But all creation is groaning. That's what it's pointing at. It's not merely—it is pointing at a fundamental way in which the woman in a role is a painful role now, and the man in his role is a painful role now.

So you want to go find a job where you're happy and satisfied? Well, do business with Genesis 3 because I don't think that job in complete form exists this side of heaven, but it's talking about even more than that, a painful world.

The world once marked by beauty and order is now plagued by calamity, disease, disability, and dysfunction. Tornadoes crumble houses on huddled families.

[34 : 08] Cancer spreads without warning. Chronic pain cripples plans for retirement. Young couples learn their child will be disabled for life. Faithful employees are laid off.

Good reputations are destroyed. Godly families are broken by loss. As Solomon said, and we learned last year, all things are full of weariness.

The whole world, Romans 8 said, is like a woman in labor crying out, get this baby out. I mean, that's what's going on.

It's all groaning. It's not just you. It's everything. Death.

Death. Look in verse 19. It says, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Ashes to ashes, dust to...

[35 : 11] I mean, it's almost poetic. But it's deeply tragic. Man and woman are living souls.

They're embodied spirit. They were created to live forever. But God says, because you rejected me and ate of the tree, whether it's three score and ten, or whenever I choose one day, I will say, no more.

And you will die and go back to the dust. The effects of sin could not be more tragic, more far-reaching, more devastating.

Point three, but God's grace is better than imagined.

The final verses in our text emphasize God's grace and provision in a bit of a surprising way.

[36 : 16] Look at verse 20. The man called his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living. Now, Adam gave names to all the animals, as Dylan sang.

And back in Genesis 2, man gave names to all the animals. But why does he wait to name Eve until after he learns of the effects of sin?

I mean, first reading, this seems out of place. Why is this here? This chapter and all about the activity of God, or this section, this chapter, and all about the activity of God, but why suddenly does it talk about him naming her?

I think it's an expression of faith. Adam knew he deserved to die immediately, but God is withholding judgment.

God decided that life would continue for as long as he decides. And so Adam names her in faith. Wherever this is going, I'm going to live the life I'm given.

[37 : 29] Then the Lord makes clothes for them. Look at verse 21. The Lord comes to them.

The Lord kills an animal. Takes its skins to make clothing suitable to cover their nakedness and shame until he could provide something better.

The Lord drives a man out of the garden. Lest he try to reach for the tree of life and be struck down. He guards it with the cherubim.

Next place we see them is in the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies. Flaming sword to guard the way of the tree of life because Adam didn't guard it.

Now, these verses reveal that God's grace is better than imagined. God does not immediately judge. That's what people say.

[38 : 51] Now, what's going on? He said, surely you'll die if you eat of this tree. Well, what happened? They didn't immediately die. Well, God is being gracious. Like every sin demands a strike down like Ananias and Sapphira, but God is withholding judgment.

God continues to care for them and provide them. God drives them from the garden to protect them. God's grace is better than imagined, but these verses show us and whisper of how much better grace really is.

Look at verse 15b. Actually, yeah, b. He says, talking to the serpent, he, well, let's go up a little bit.

I will put him between you and the woman and between your offspring, that's the offspring of the evil one, and her offspring, the offspring of the woman. He, this offspring, shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

There's something incredibly significant foretold in this verse. From the woman will come a son who will bruise the head of the serpent. Written over a thousand years before the birth of Christ, theologians call this the proto-euangelion.

[40 : 24] The first good news. Proto means first. Euangelion means good news. So the first good news. It's the first, many would argue, the first prophecy about Jesus Christ in our Bible.

But what does it mean? Well, it says, he, this offspring, this son of the woman, will bruise the serpent's head. Now, the head represents the authority, the place of authority.

And so the serpent, the devil, is the one who holds the world captive. He's an authority, the God of this world, under sin, shame, and guilt. But this one will overpower and conquer the devil.

Now, we're meant to see that this conflict that's brought about between man and the devil is a conflict in which this one will enter in a most acute way.

He will be tried and tempted by him in every way, yet will never sin in conquering me, but not merely avoiding sin. He will say, it is my food, as our Lord said, to do the will of him who sent me.

[41 : 28] He will love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He will not eat and take from that which is forbidden. He will love his neighbor as himself. He'll obey God perfectly in word, thought, and deed to the point of death.

So he will bruise the serpent's head. We know from Revelation 12 and 20 that this is a reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, but it also says the serpent will bruise.

You shall bruise his heel. The serpent will bruise him. Whispered into this simple verse is the mystery of the gospel.

The Son, our Lord, will not merely conquer the devil by remaining sinless. He will conquer the devil by suffering for those who could not remain sinless.

He will take upon himself the judgment of all who failed the temptation. The animal was killed to make clothing to cover the shame of Adam and Eve, but the Son of God must be killed to cover our shame.

[42 : 33] He will not merely obey. He must be bruised. I want to help you see what I believe is here is in this prophecy, in this prophecy that he will bruise the serpent's head and the serpent will bruise his heel.

And in the animal killed is the biblical principle of sacrificial love by substitution. So that is a major principle that runs through our Bible.

This biblical principle of sacrificial love by substitution. And this principle runs through our Bible and holds it together. And so just like the animal is offered to provide clothing for Adam and Eve here, so too the ram is offered instead of Isaac on the mountain.

And the Passover lamb is offered instead of the firstborn son of Egypt. On the day of the atonement, the goat is offered up instead of the people as they lay their hands on him and confess their sin over him.

But most importantly, the greatest display of sacrificial love by substitution is in the death of Jesus Christ. What we're meant to see, this doctrine of substitution here, is that in order for sinners to be made right with God, in order for sinners to be kept secure forever, we need a substitutionary sacrifice.

[43 : 50] We need someone to stand between us and God. God is holy. God dwells in unapproachable light. His eyes are too pure to look on evil.

God is a consuming fire. And we are born in sin, guilty to sin, captive to sin, unable to free ourselves from sin, no ability to reach out to God.

But in order for sinners to be made right with God, the wrath of God must be satisfied by someone. Either the wrath of God remains on you and on me, as John 3 tells us, or the wrath of God will be poured out on a substitute, on a sacrifice, on one who stands in between, perfectly representing us and God, sinless in every way, so that He might stand as the sinless sacrifice.

That one is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The mystery of the cross is a mystery of substitution, of sacrificial love by substitution.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Verse Peter 3, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the trees, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[45 : 13] So what is contained in these verses, in this chapter, is the mystery of what God came to do. The mystery of this God who did not flush the world down, but He said, where are you?

Come out of hiding. Take this animal's skins, but another one's coming, who will cover you forever.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. God so loved the world that He sacrificed His only Son.

And mysteriously, as Isaiah 53, God tells us, God so loved the world that He crushed Him. The mystery of the cross is not a mystery of physical torture like the gulag.

The mystery of the cross is a mystery of a God who poured out His wrath on one He delighted in from eternity. John Stott helpfully says, the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man.

[46 : 54] Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be. God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be.

Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone. God accepts penalties that belong to man alone.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. The only appropriate response to the wreckage, the unimaginable wreckage of sin is turning in humility to Jesus Christ.

That's the glimmering image of God we desperately need. What could restore us from the lie of the serpent is this God who went the farthest distance possible to rescue us from sin and death?

Let us worship Him. We praise You, God. We hide in You, cast ourselves on You. I pray for anyone here unsure of their relationship with You.

[48 : 26] They adhere to the words of the gospel and through this passage that God is coming to them in love. Thank You. On this side of Calvary we can rejoice that You didn't offer another animal to clothe us temporarily but You've offered the sacrifice to end all sacrifices to clothe us eternally.

So Lord, we confess our trust again in Jesus Christ. We praise You that He has set us free.

We hide in Him this day. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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