

Genesis: *The Curse and The Gospel*  
Genesis 3:14-24

Adam and Eve have sinned against God by eating of the forbidden fruit. To make matters even worse, both Adam and Eve play the victim card. Adam blames his wife for eating of the fruit, and he even blames God for making the woman and placing her in the garden. Eve blames the serpent who deceived her. Neither the man nor the woman is willing to take responsibility for their sin against God. God has patiently listened to their defense; and now, as we return to Genesis 3, we will consider God's judgment. Please stand and let us read Genesis 3:14-24:

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
but he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> 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;

<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> 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.”

<sup>20</sup> The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. <sup>21</sup> And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” <sup>23</sup> therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> 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.

My message will fall under four subheadings: 1) The Serpent's Doom; 2) The Woman's Pain; 3) Adam's Curse; and 4) The Plan of Redemption.

## **I. The Serpent's Doom**

If you recall, following the sinful disobedience of Adam and Eve, God comes to the guilty couple and begins asking questions. God first addresses Adam as the responsible overseer of the garden. Adam blames Eve, so God turns to Eve to hear her side of the story. Eve blames the serpent who deceived her, so we would then expect God to turn to the serpent and ask the serpent to give an account for his deceptive behavior. But that doesn't happen. Instead, when God turns to the serpent, God immediately declares His judgment on the crafty creature.

We read in vs. 14: The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all the beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life."

Now, there are many ways to understand God's curse against the serpent, and we must be thoughtful as we seek to understand God's words and their implications.

First of all, we know that the serpent is, in fact, a creature...a "beast of the field" made by God. The serpent as God made it, according to 3:1, was "more crafty than any other beast of the field," which is not at all a derogatory or condemning observation. That said, there does seem to be some culpability that is attributed to the creature for the deception of Eve.

We also know that behind this serpent in the garden is something, or Someone, other than the creature. John reveals in Rev. 12 that the serpent is, indeed, Satan. Now, that said, we have no reason to believe that Satan is a serpent. From our study of scripture, we learned that Satan was once a glorious, spiritual creature in heaven that rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. So even though the creaturely serpent is responsible and will be cursed by God, we should assume that there are two levels of judgment happening here. First, the actual creature made by God...the serpent...is being cursed, and then the malevolent spiritual entity, Satan, is also being cursed.

God begins with the words, "Because you have done this..." The crime of deceiving Eve is now the cause for God's judgment.

For its role in deceiving the woman, God states to the creaturely serpent, "...cursed are you above all livestock and above all the beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life."

We are left with the impression that the serpent, prior to the Fall, may have been formed in a way that did not require it to slither along the ground; but then, due to its role in the Fall, the serpent is sentenced to slithering on its belly from that point forward. There is also a sentence of humiliation for the serpent/Satan. The imagery of eating dust is found in other places in scripture<sup>1</sup>, and it always points to defeat and humiliation. At this point in the sentencing, it would seem that God is not only cursing the serpent, but also the Liar indwelling the creature. The fallen angel, once glorious beyond compare in the city of Light, is now cursed to eat dust all the days of its life. Satan's humiliation is fixed and certain; he shall never again enjoy a moment of glory...dust is his fate.

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<sup>1</sup> See Micah 7:17; Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23

But Satan's curse does not end with his humiliation. God continues His sentencing: 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.

Though Satan hated Eve as an image-bearer of God, we can't help but observe his strategy: Satan attempted to earn Eve's allegiance through his lies. Just as he deceived many angels and convinced them to follow him to their utter destruction, so Satan seeks to receive worship and adoration from the humans who now occupy the earth. But that's not going to happen.

God declares that He will put enmity between the Liar and the woman, and between those who belong to the Liar and the "seed" of the woman. Furthermore, God declares an event that is to come: He (the seed of Eve) will bruise the head of the serpent, and the serpent shall bruise His heel.

Now, some may read these verses and conclude that this ancient tale simply describes why humans have an inherent dread of snakes; which, in fact, most humans do. Some may even see this prediction as stating what is often the case in relationships between snakes and humans: snakes bite our feet, but we crush them under our heels.

Is that all that is happening here? Is God simply describing the future relationship between snakes and humans? Hardly.

Remember the context. The deceptive serpent (who could talk and claimed to have supernatural knowledge of God's intent) enticed the image-bearers of God to disobey their Creator, introducing the corrosive effect of sin into God's perfect creation. So, this curse from God upon the serpent is clearly more than a simple prediction that humans will forever have an antagonistic relationship with snakes. God is cursing the Liar, but God is also revealing a future event that will lead to the ultimate defeat of the Liar.

According to vs. 15, the Seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, but not before He (the Seed of the woman) is wounded by the serpent's strike.

Now, to be fair, there are various ways to interpret the "seed" of the first woman. Some interpret that word to be her lineage in general (the Jewish people); some interpret her seed to ultimately be the Church; but the prevailing interpretation is that the "seed" here refers to a singular descendent of Eve. Such is why the ESV completes vs. 15 using the word "He." The ESV reads, "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

For many church fathers and thinkers, Genesis 3:15 represents our first glimpse into God's ultimate plan of redemption. Although Satan has scored a temporary victory in leading the image-bearers of God to sin, God has already determined to crush Satan and redeem His image-bearers through the Seed of the first woman, though that victory will be costly.

Where else does God reveal His plan for redemption through a suffering seed of Eve? Remember Isaiah 53, written many years later but still hundreds of years before Christ, where we read:

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed...the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Church, please do not consider Jesus on a cross as some kind of “Plan B” that God had to come up with once Adam and Eve fell. As hard as it is for us to understand, God was not caught off guard by the Fall. Though Adam and Eve were not predestined to fall, God certainly foreknew that it would come about. Such is perhaps why God chose to be God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God knew before the foundation of the world that His image-bearers would need saving. So even before Satan can do a victory dance following his successful deception of Eve, God reveals His plan to redeem what has been lost, and to vanquish the Enemy once and for all.

We’ll return to this observation in a bit; but let us now look to

## **II. The Woman’s Pain**

There are always consequences for sinning against God. But note, God does not dole out punishment arbitrarily, nor are His punishments “general” in nature. Instead, we note that the punishment always fits the crime. That was true for the serpent; it is also true for the woman.

God renders His judgment against the woman in vs. 16:

16 To the woman he said,  
“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.  
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
but he shall rule over you.”

Note that God does not state, “Because of what you did...” before addressing Eve. The serpent is culpable for his deception, and Adam will be held responsible for eating the forbidden fruit, but God does not name the woman’s sin. Clearly the woman is not innocent of wrongdoing; but God does not articulate Eve’s crime. Adam was created and placed in the garden as God’s steward. Adam was also over and responsible for Eve; thus Adam will be held responsible for eating the fruit—not Eve. We are left to assume, then, that Eve is punished for listening to the serpent’s temptation and acting apart from her husband. And what is her punishment? Our first mother will bear the consequence of her sin in the two areas unique to the woman: 1) in childbearing; and 2) in her relationship with her husband.

First, the woman learns that her childbearing will, from this point forward, include great pain. Now, note that pain is a consequence of sin. Prior to sin, we can assume that the first woman experienced minimal pain, if any pain at all, in childbearing; that is, IF she had born children prior to the Fall. That possibility seems implied since God says He will now “multiply your pain” in childbearing. This curse of intolerable pain is something new as opposed to the way it was previously. Now, I don’t want to overextend here...we can’t know if Eve had any children before the Fall, and that does not seem important in this narrative, but it’s possible.

What is for certain now, after the Fall, is that childbearing will bring about tremendous pain for the woman, and to the best of my knowledge, that is still the case to this day.

The pain a woman experiences in childbirth serves to remind us that sin has great consequences, but that pain is not a death sentence...and this is significant. Remember that Eve is expecting death. God promised that on the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would surely die. Now, we know that bodily death is coming for our first parents, and we know that spiritual death became the new reality for all who share the blood of Adam and Eve. Even so, this punishment from God comes laced with grace—Eve will not die today. In fact, God promises that she will yet bear children, and He just said that her Seed will one day crush the head of the deceptive serpent! Church, don't miss this: God is perfectly just, and perfectly merciful. Eve deserves punishment, and that pain is real: but God's mercy remains for His image-bearers. The full penalty that Eve deserves will be set upon Another...that's the plan. And though her childbearing will be painful, her "Seed" will be the Hope of the world!

Now, the second punishment for the sinful woman will impact her relationship in marriage. The sentence spoken by God here in vs. 16 is traditionally translated, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

It seems unlikely that God punishes the woman by giving her a desire FOR her husband. I think we can agree that, prior to the Fall, the man and wife had a mutual desire for each other which would lead to and be an important part of the two becoming one as God intended. So, what does this verse mean?

Some translations, including some copies of the ESV, read this way:  
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
but he shall rule over you.

However we interpret the Hebrew, what we know is that sin will corrupt the marriage, and it will specifically corrupt the woman's desire and the husbands rule. Specifically, Dr. Kenneth Mathews interprets this text to mean that sin will now create a struggle for mastery between the sexes. The 'desire' of the woman is her attempt to control her husband, but she will fail because God has ordained that the man exercise his leadership function.<sup>2</sup>

To be clear, sin affects both spouses in the marriage, but here God makes it clear that Eve will suffer from a desire that brings her pain in her marriage, just as childbirth will be painful. The impression is that because Eve transgressed God's command to follow her husband's lead and instead led her husband, her desire will be to lead her husband, control her husband, dominate her husband as a consequence of her sin, yet she will not be able to escape God's determination that the husband shall rule over his wife.

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<sup>2</sup> Mathews, 12.

Now, I've spent a great deal of time in the past unpacking the biblical model of marriage, so I won't cover all that ground today. I do want to address God's statement that "he shall rule over you" and this biblical order of the husband serving as the leader in the family system.

The biblical model of leadership entrusted to the husband looks NOTHING like heavy-handedness, abuse, diminishment, or domination. In Ephesians 5, Paul states that the role of the husband is to love his wife and to sacrifice for his wife in the same way that Christ loved and gave up His life for the Church. Peter calls husbands to live in an understanding way, showing honor to their brides. The Bible does not in any way give abusive, domineering husbands a hall-pass. The idea here is jurisdiction, oversight, and leadership...not domination, diminishment, or abuse. Prior to sin, that all made sense. After sin, God's intent for marriage has been corrupted in the woman's desire and the husband's role...and that makes marriage hard and often painful...can I hear an amen? Remember that Christ can and will redeem what sin corrupted, so let us not despair in our marriages, but at least we have an idea of why marriage is often painful for even the strongest of couples. Sin corrupted what once was perfect...that's what sin does.

OK, let's now look to...

### **III. Adam's Curse**

Having addressed the serpent and the woman, God now turns His attention to the first man of creation, Adam. Let us recall that God formed Adam in His image and placed in him in the garden with the specific responsibility to work and keep the garden, and to exercise dominion over the animals. God then crafted a tailor-made spouse who was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh to be by his side that they might enjoy oneness, be fruitful, and multiply.

The order of God's creation was clear: Adam was to listen to God; Eve was to take her lead from Adam; and Adam and Eve were to rule over the earth and the animals. But due to the evil influence of Satan, Eve listened to the serpent, Adam listened to Eve, and no one listened to God.

Thus, God now turns to Adam in vs. 17 and says:

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.

Now, let's be clear: God did not just define "listening to the voice of your wife" as a sin! Husbands, don't go there.

Adam's sin was eating from the tree of which God commanded him not to eat; but we also get the sense that Adam failed to be the leader that God created him to be on that fateful day. Adam should have played his role and led his wife away from the crafty serpent and the forbidden tree, but he didn't. In fact, in the story of the Fall, we almost get the sense that Adam was standing passively next to Eve the whole time, fully aware of the serpent's words, and he did nothing. Listen again to the end of 3:6, "...she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

This is the reason for God's rebuke. Adam's first and primary allegiance was to God and God's Word; but Adam passively chose to listen to the voice of his wife who had been deceived,

and he then ate of the forbidden fruit, knowing full well what God had said about the consequence of eating that fruit.

So, there are two primary consequences that come about as a result of Adam's sin: 1) a curse on the land, and 2) the curse of death. First, God curses the ground as a direct consequence of Adam's sin. Whereas the woman's pain will come about in her unique experience of childbearing, Adam's pain will come from his necessary and dependent relationship with the ground as a source of sustenance and provision for his family. No longer will Adam and Eve stroll through the garden and eat of the perfect fruit and vegetables that God provided for their enjoyment. We'll see next Sunday that Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden, and now mankind will be forced to work the land and live off the plants of the field. Due to the curse, the ground is no longer Adam's friend. The new but abnormal condition of the ground will inevitably produce thorns and thistles, and forever after work (which was once a gift and a naturally fulfilling part of human existence) will be painful.

Church, don't miss this: The consequence of the Fall brings a curse not only upon humanity, but upon the earth as well. I think we can all agree that crabgrass is a product of the Fall, amen? If you have ever worked a garden, you know that under the worst possible weather conditions, when your plants are dying, the weeds are doing just fine! That curse upon the ground extends to everything else that we lay our hands to. There are always thorns and thistles...whatever the ground is that you call work. Just about the time you get your team fully staffed, someone leaves. Just about the time that you think your company is growing, the economy tanks or a pandemic strikes. You finally land the perfect job only to discover that your co-workers mock you and sabotage your reputation. You finally get that promotion and a month later your company gets sold and you are laid off. Work is painful; but it wasn't supposed to be that way. The curse of the ground goes back to the sin of Adam; it is a curse that makes our work, our toil, our sweat, and our efforts to provide...painful.

The second curse of Adam is death. We get the sense that humans were never created to deteriorate. Death is an intruder; a consequence of sin. Sadly, from this time forward, due to Adam's sin, death is inevitable. The image-bearer of God will expire—he will return to the dust from whence he was made. No amount of surgeries, medications, working out, or cosmology will affect our final destiny. Humans will now die; and their bodies will return to the dust.

Now, we're going to stop there because that's depressing and we've run out of time, but I do want to end with what I think is hopeful observation.

#### **IV. The Plan of Redemption**

If you think about it, all things considered, it seems like God's judgment could have been (and should have been) worse, right? I mean, it's bad, but God has laced His judgments with a surprising degree of mercy...can you see that? Adam will have to painfully work and sweat to grow food, but the land will still produce food, right? Eve will have to endure great pain in childbearing, but she is still blessed to bear children. They will both die, eventually, but God will extend their lives for hundreds of years before they finally expire.

So...where's the justice? These creatures have directly violated God's honor and law, but do these punishments atone for their sin against God? Do these punishments atone for bringing a curse upon all mankind and even the earth? No...they don't...and we know that even now.

God is remarkably merciful to the first couple. He has spared them the kind of wrath that they deserve. Why? Because God has a Plan...and that Plan includes a day that the Seed of Eve will crush the head of the serpent. He has already revealed a Hope for redemption, even in the midst of the curse.

Church, I hope you can see that this is not only the story of the Fall...it is not simply a story that ends with a curse; it is also the introduction of the Gospel! God loves His image-bearers. God loves the world He created. And though, when given the freedom to choose, His image-bearers chose to sin against God and brought a curse upon ourselves and all of creation, God does not abandon His creation. God has a Plan to make the wrongs right; which is why God can be and will always be perfectly just, and perfectly merciful. We'll dive deeper into the implications of the Fall and what comes next as we return to Genesis 3 next Sunday.

For now, as we close, We are left with a choice: we can focus on and lament the curse of sin and the painful existence we endure as humans on planet earth; or, we can focus on and be grateful for God's enduring mercies in the midst of our sinful and broken existence. We live every day in both: The Curse, and God's Mercy. As for me, I cannot help but be grateful for God's mercies, because I know what my sin deserves, and I know the wounded Seed of Eve and what He endured for my salvation...thanks be to God.

Let us be grateful for God's enduring mercy, amen? Will you pray with me?