

God Promised a Son

Genesis 3: 1 – 15

A few years ago I was given a book with the title, “The Hole in Our Gospel”, in which the author seemed to be stating that there was something missing from the way that we proclaim the gospel, particularly when we do so to people who live in poverty. He had a point. James, the brother of Jesus once wrote,

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? James 2:15–16 ESV

Of course, we do very well to remember these things, but I think that the hole in our gospel may come from the fact that we have come to think of “the Gospel” as something smaller than the Holy and Divine Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments—as if the gospel was something that is merely a part of what we read when we read the Bible—usually, just that part of Scripture that we know as “the Gospels” and maybe a few other select texts, mostly from the New Testament. Some have gone so far as to say that the rest—presumably the non-gospel parts, or the non-salvation parts—are not really the word of God at all, or at least not in the same way as the Gospels.

But question and answer 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that this model is an inaccurate handling of the Word of God, and the truth is something like this, in which we find that the Bible is the Word of God written, and is, in it’s entirety, the Gospel. That’s why question and answer 19 tells us that God himself began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise, and later proclaimed it through patriarchs and prophets, portraying it eventually by the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law.

More importantly, that’s why Jesus, with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, walked them through the Old Testament scriptures

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them **in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.** Luke 24:27 ESV

As someone has said, “It takes the whole Bible to preach the whole gospel, and it takes the whole Gospel to make a whole Christian.” So, here we are, just 24 days from Christmas (I hope that doesn’t come as a shock to anyone) and opening the Bible not to one of the nativity passages in the Gospel of Matthew or Luke, but to Genesis, and not merely to Genesis, but to the very passage that first highlights our need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because, when we enter the story, we enter a world of which God said, “It is all very good,” and that world is inhabited by morally perfect people—people who have not sinned—who were created after the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. One might think that if ever there was a time and place where people would be able to hear and comprehend and obey the law of God, then this would be it.

And make no mistake; there was law in the garden. The obvious one in Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17:

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:16–17 ESV

But there were other laws as well. Genesis chapter 1, verse 28.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:28 ESV

The thing is, this was the law of God for our first parents and, through them, for all humankind, but notice how gracious it is. The commandments of Genesis 1 come as a blessing to Adam and Eve. God gives them not only a stewardship over all creation, but the rule of all creation.

See, we tend to think of the law as an inhibitor; something designed to hold us back and keep us in our place. But the law of God was not meant to be an inhibitor, it was a gracious gift designed keep people walking in life and light and holiness. That’s why the Psalmist, speaking of the gracious law of God that so many completely despise says,

⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Psalms 119:97 ESV

So, here in Genesis, we have good people in a good world given a good word from their creator; but Genesis 3 opens with those ominous words.

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. Genesis 3:1 ESV

Now, the word translated here as “crafty”, is used in a couple different ways in Scripture, and not always negative. In this text, it appears to be at least neutral, so it’s not saying that “the serpent was more evil...” Not at all.

It’s also worth a mention that this was no ordinary serpent. In fact, it was probably a creature we wouldn’t even recognize. As Paul says in 2nd Corinthians,

¹⁴ ...Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14 ESV

Contrary to the image presented sometimes by pop culture, then, Satan doesn’t run around wearing scary makeup and monster costumes. He masquerades as an angel of light. He comes in a form that we want to trust, telling us the things that we really want to hear. He’s deceptive. He’s subtle. He’s crafty like that. The full quote from 2nd Corinthians says this:

¹⁴ ...Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. 2 Corinthians 11:14–15 ESV

So, Satan's not going to meet you walking through the park some evening as a drooling zombie who wants to eat your brain. He comes after us as he came after Eve. Subtle, and beautiful, speaking words that sound like music to a heart that's looking for a reason to doubt.

He didn't come up to Eve in the garden as a terrifying fire-breathing dragon and say, "Bow down to me or perish in fire and blood!" He didn't even come after Jesus like that during the temptation in the wilderness. He came to Jesus with a very helpful suggestion. Seeing that Jesus was hungry,

³ ...the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Matthew 4:3 ESV

And he approached Eve with a simple, if somewhat ambiguous, question.

¹ ..."Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" Genesis 3:1 ESV

I say it was ambiguous, because the meaning depends on how you understand the word "any". He might be saying, "Has God really forbidden you to eat from any and every tree?" or he might be saying, "Is there any tree in the garden from which God has forbidden you to eat?" It's not that important really; but notice the underlying question.

Satan was really asking, "Are you totally certain that you know what God wants here? Isn't there a chance that you've misunderstood him?" And he asks this same question today in book after book after book, some by popular, formerly-evangelical authors. "Are you really sure that you heard God right?" And underneath that question the implication, "God doesn't speak all that clearly. He has this tendency to mumble, so it would be totally understandable if you misunderstood."

Of course, Eve made a game attempt at a response. She

² ...said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ 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.'" Genesis 3:2-3 ESV

To which Satan responded, "Not only is God a mumbler, he's a liar." He

⁴ ...said to the woman, "You will not surely die." Genesis 3:4 ESV

But of course, Eve had it right, God said that they would, but who do you want to believe, the one who said "No," or the one who promises you everything you ever wanted. Besides, according to Satan, not only is God a mumbler and a liar, really, God is simply not good.

⁴ "You will not surely die." Genesis 3:4 ESV

said the serpent.

⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:5 ESV

God is holding back on you. God is keeping you from true happiness and fulfillment. God is making you a slave, (so implies that old serpent, the devil).

But remember, God gave them the world and everything in it. He made them king and queen, subject only to him. God was not and is not a mumbler, or a liar, or a miser. God is good. But Satan is “crafty”. He nudges us just a little off center, and we begin to wonder if we heard God correctly. Is this Bible really his word? And so, subtly, inch by inch, Satan moves us from the truth. He just gives us a nudge. He says, “You know, if you look at this in a different way, God isn’t very nice, is he?” And even though we know better—even though we know, as Peter said in 2nd Peter 1, verse 3, that

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... ^{2 Peter 1:3 ESV}

we start listening to those subtle questions. “If God is good, then why are there earthquakes and tsunamis? If God is good, why did I receive this particular diagnosis? If God is good, why isn’t every day just another day in Disneyland?” And soon, as Paul wrote in Romans 1:

²¹ ...although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ^{Romans 1:21–22 ESV}

Now, notice those words, “they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...” and ask yourself, “How often is this me. How often do I overlook and take for granted all that God has given to me, or anything that God has given, for that matter?”

We can be like that as Christians. We think we know what we really want or really need, and we can’t understand why God’s not doing it for us. Maybe we start to question, “If God is really good, then why...” this, (just fill in the blank). Meantime, God has given us literally everything that we need for life and godliness, and we tear through those gifts with hardly a glance or a word of gratitude, and that old serpent, the devil, smiles, and says, “Yup. This is where it starts. Even though they knew God, they neither honored him as God or gave thanks...but their foolish hearts were darkened.”

And if that was the end of the story, it would be a bleak midwinter indeed, in spite of all the lights and treats and family gatherings. But that’s not the end of the story, in fact, it’s just the beginning. and there is so much more that we could talk about here: the fact that the first sin sprang from an ungrateful heart; the absolute uselessness of trying to clothe ourselves in our own works when we have lost the righteousness of Christ; the false repentance when Adam and Eve blamed everybody from God to each other to the devil; and even our first parents’ attempt to hide from God. These are all things that we could and should consider, but for this morning, consider this.

When all is said and done, when the excuses have been offered and the fig-leaf garments found wanting to cover the nakedness of Adam’s soul, God would pronounce the curses of the covenant—he would tell them exactly what it would be like to live in death—but before he

did any of that, he made a promise. And please understand this, for Adam and Eve, and for us as well, the promise comes before the curse. God's grace was already there to catch them before he pronounced the judgement which was their due. Because the gospel is like that. Grace comes first. So, in Genesis 3, verses 14 and 15.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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."

Genesis 3:14–15 ESV

See, sin is lawlessness—always has been; always will be. It's that simple. When we fail to do or to be what God requires of us in his law, we sin. And we do it all the time, again and again and again, if not in an overt manner, then in the quietness of our ungrateful and covetous hearts.

Now, we might be tempted to think that when everyone's guilty, then no one is, but that's not true. In truth, when everyone's guilty, then everyone's guilty, and this is the problem. God will not allow sin to go unpunished—not the sin we are born with, or the sins that we personally commit. Even from this very first reference in the book of Genesis, the Gospel is not, "Just don't worry about it. Whatever it is, God will overlook it all." The Gospel, even from this first reference is, sin is **our** problem (and it's a big problem), but **God** Himself will provide the solution. In fact, God Himself will be the solution through His Son, our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. That was His promise in the Garden of Eden, and God always keeps His promises. That's why

⁴ ...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Galatians 4:4–6 ESV

So, God promised a Son, and He delivered. And in the weeks to come, if the Lord is willing, we will see that the Son became the sacrifice, the sacrifice became our Savior, and our Savior became the Sovereign over all creation. As the prophet wrote,

⁶ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. Isaiah 9:6–7 NKJV