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Genesis 3:14-15

Eleventh Message

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# THE DAWN OF WORLD REDEMPTION

*SERIES: OUR STORY OF ORIGINS*

One of my favorite radio programs is *Forum* on KQED. I rarely hear a whole show; I usually catch snippets as I'm driving around, resulting in many of what NPR calls "driveway moments." I happened to listen in half-way through Friday's second hour. Dave Iverson was hosting a program entitled "How We Decide" under the tag line "How did the US Airways pilot decide so quickly to land his disabled plane in the Hudson River?" My attention was grabbed by a comment by one of the guests, Zachary Shore, author of *Blunder: Why Smart People Make Bad Decisions*. He said, "The ability to admit mistakes is essential." This was contradicted by a strip in the comics section of yesterday's paper. I happened to notice Wiley Miller's strip *Non Sequitur*: Danae, the little girl, had set up her booth offering, "History revised while-u-wait: Learn why nothing was my fault."

Intellectually we might know that Zachary Shore is right, but existentially we tend to side with Danae. We know in theory that admitting our mistakes is the right thing to do, but we find it incredibly hard to actually do so. This was certainly true of the first man and woman, as we saw last week. They evaded responsibility, claiming, "Nothing was my fault." Lest we be too hard on them, we're all in the same boat. It is very hard for us to admit our mistakes, to admit our sin. The question now is how would God respond to this evasion of responsibility, this inability to come clean and ask for forgiveness.

The narrator has directed our attention back and forth across the man, the woman and the serpent. He introduced us to them in their order within creation: the man, the woman and the serpent. The man was to heed God's voice in the instructions given him. The woman was to heed the man's voice as he passed those instructions along to her. As ruler over the earth and guardian of the garden, the man had authority over every living creature on earth, with the woman as his equal helper. But the order was turned on its head. Sin and rebellion happened from the bottom up: first the serpent, then the woman, and finally the man. The woman heeded the serpent's voice and the man heeded the woman's voice. God questioned them in the reverse of this reversed order, i.e., in the correct order, starting with the man, then the woman. He gave them the opportunity to admit their mistakes, but they refused to do so. The man blamed the woman and the woman blamed the serpent, thereby showing their acceptance of this upside-down order. By evading responsibility the man accepted his place under the woman, and the woman accepted her place under the serpent.

The man and the woman were in a state of fear and shame: of self, of each other, of God, and of responsibility. By refusing to take responsibility and admit their mistakes, they were rejecting the offer of the only one who could help them. What would God do with their rejection? What would God do with this situation where the man and woman so clearly needed to be helped yet refused help? God's questioning of them had gotten nowhere other than clarifying the depth of the problem with the man and the woman. Yet through

it all God remained the LORD God, the LORD who pursues relationship.

The LORD asked three questions of the man and one of the woman. He gave the man and the woman each a voice, but they squandered the gift. They used their voice only to evade responsibility and pass blame. Though they stood before the LORD God, they continued to hide in their shame and fear. The LORD God treated their evasions with silence, signaling his non-acceptance of their arguments. Without asking the serpent any questions he turned to judgment. With all three offenders now in front of him he assumed the role of Judge. He alone could pronounce judgment because he was the Creator. He was the one sinned against. He delivered his judgment in the reverse order: first on the serpent, then on the woman, and finally on the man. Today we'll look at his judgment on the serpent (3:14-15). Next time we'll look at his judgment on the woman and the man (3:16-19).

**So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,**

**"Cursed are you above all livestock  
and all wild animals!**

**You will crawl on your belly  
and you will eat dust  
all the days of your life.**

**And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:14-15 TNIV)**

The LORD had questioned the man and the woman but he does not question the serpent. He gives the serpent no opportunity to speak; he deprives him of a voice, giving evil no opportunity to explain itself. The LORD had no wish to hear the voice of the serpent, whereas he had wanted to hear the voice of the man and the woman. Instead he launched straight into judgment upon the serpent, first assigning blame: "Because you have done this." The evil power masquerading as the serpent is given no opportunity to evade responsibility, but is immediately condemned. God's first words of judgment carry a weighty solemnity and finality: "Cursed are you." "Curse" is a jarring word in a book that has hitherto been about blessing. God had created the world in a state of blessing. On the fifth day he blessed the first living creatures. On the sixth day he blessed the humans. On the seventh day he blessed that day itself. To bless means to endow with potency for an abundant and successful life. Because God is the creator, it is in his gift to grant this potency. I find it helpful to think of blessing as an arrow signifying a forward-moving trajectory in life. God endowed his creation with abundant life, so that it would successfully fulfill the purposes for which he created it.

Curse is the opposite of bless, meaning to deprive of abundant life. Where "bless" is a forward moving arrow, "curse" is a line with

a dead-end. By cursing the serpent God consigns him to frustration and futility. It is not simply the serpent that God is cursing; he is cursing the evil powers that are working through the serpent. The serpent is the tool and representative of an evil power which the New Testament unambiguously identifies as Satan. The Bible gives us very little information about the origins of evil, but tells us much about what God is doing about evil. This is the information we really need to know. It might satisfy our curiosity to know the origins of evil and of Satan, but what we really need to know is what God is doing about them. This is what the Bible gives us, beginning in this verse.

God makes no attempt to redeem the serpent, Satan or evil, whereas he does make considerable effort to redeem humanity. Instead, God moves straight to judgment upon evil. By cursing the serpent God announces that he will frustrate evil; he will not allow evil to be successful. He will frustrate all Satan's attempts to oppose his purposes. But God does not immediately remove evil from the world. He certainly had the power, the authority and the justification to do so. It would have spared the world a lot of trouble had he done so. But had he done so, he would have had to remove humanity, for humanity had been seduced into evil. In just a few more chapters evil will become so extensive that God will remove almost all humanity, but he only tries this solution once. God allows evil to continue, but does not allow evil to get the upper hand. There are many things about evil which I do not understand. I must be content to leave them hidden within the inscrutable purposes of God. What the Bible does show me clearly is what God is doing about evil. As the hymn says, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." There have been many times when it seems that evil has gained the upper hand, but God is always at work frustrating evil. That same hymn continues, "Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his works in vain." It is with the eye of faith that I have to look at the world, seeing not the evil that seems so often ascendant, but God who is at work behind the scenes overturning evil with good.

Cursing the serpent consigns evil and Satan to a dead end in history. But God allows them to continue in existence up until that dead end. That dead end will be a long time coming. Pronounced here in the third chapter of Scripture, it is not reached until the third last chapter of Scripture. In Revelation 20 God throws Satan, portrayed as the dragon, the ancient serpent, into the lake of fire, the place of eternal judgment, where he is removed from having any effect upon the earth. Once all evil is removed from the earth, the earth can then be joined with heaven into a holy cosmos, as we see in the last two chapters of the Bible. Revelation 20 still lies in the future. In the meantime God allows Satan to operate in his cosmos, but Satan operates under the curse. It's as if God has Satan on a chain; indeed the New Testament portrays him as bound in chains. God does allow Satan freedom but it's a freedom within limits. God allows Satan to continue to oppose his purposes, but God constantly frustrates those efforts. Satan is never portrayed as an equal and opposite power to God. He is always subject to God's sovereignty, and under God's sovereignty he is cursed, subject to futility and frustration.

This humiliation of evil is symbolically pronounced in the second half of verse 14. God consigns the serpent to a life of eating dust and crawling on his belly. These metaphors had the same meaning then as they do now: humiliation. The Bible suggests in a few places that Satan's sin was pride and a grasping for what he did not have, namely equality with God. Instead of achieving that higher status he is humiliated, cast down into the dust. Though he will continue to grasp he will fail for God has cursed him, consigning him to humiliation.

The naked eye will not always be able to see this, for often it seems that evil is triumphant, but the eye of faith sees God triumphant over all Satan's evil designs.

Verse 15 elaborates on this humiliation of evil to glimpse its defeat. Surprisingly, evil will be defeated at the hands of humanity. How is this possible since humanity has aligned itself with evil? It will require divine intervention to impose enmity between the woman and the serpent. God had created humanity for relationship with himself. He had placed the man and the woman in the garden that he might commune with them on earth. But the serpent had persuaded the woman that God was the enemy, withholding from her the knowledge of good and evil, withholding from her the opportunity to attain her full potential. Through his deceptive words the serpent had insinuated himself into the woman's friendship. The man, entrusted with guarding the garden, should have recognized the assault and defended both his helper and the garden. His failure allowed the redrawing of the boundary lines. Instead of acting to impose a boundary between the woman and the serpent, he allowed the serpent to impose a boundary between the woman and God. Instead of acting to maintain friendship with God he allowed the serpent to pose as the friend. The redrawn boundary was solidified by the failure of the man and the woman to accept responsibility. The man's transfer of blame to the woman and the woman's transfer of blame to the serpent did nothing to redress the situation. They both implicitly admitted that they had taken their lead from the serpent. Classifying themselves as victims implied that they would continue to be hostage to the serpent, that they would continue to be under the power of evil. But God was not content with this situation, for it frustrated the purposes for which he had created humanity. He would not allow the present situation to continue, with the woman perceiving the serpent as her friend and God as her enemy. It would take divine intervention to redraw the lines, for the man and the woman had shown themselves incapable of doing so. Here as elsewhere divine initiative is essential if there is to be any hope.

God would also extend this enmity to cover future generations: "between your offspring and hers," that is between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring. There is both good and bad news here: both the woman and the serpent will have seed or offspring. The man and the woman have rebelled against God, yet God does not terminate the human race with them. Though death has entered the world through the disobedience of the first couple, God promises that life will continue. The woman will have seed and propagate the human race. This is grace indeed. That's the good news. But the serpent will also have seed or offspring. This doesn't mean broods of little snakes, or even hordes of demons, but humans who are under the control of Satan just as the serpent is. In generations to come people will be deceived into walking in the serpent's way of life, living life under the control of Satan and his evil powers. There will thus be two lines: a line in whom Satan is at work and a line in whom God is at work.

This enmity will ultimately result in a showdown not between the two seeds but between the woman's seed and the serpent itself, that is Satan. Both will be wounded but in different ways. Though TNIV uses different verbs, they are the same in Hebrew, but their target is different. The serpentine evil will wound the woman's seed on the heel, but will itself be wounded on the head. Evil will be crushed underfoot.

Genesis 3:14-15 marks the dawn of world redemption. Verse 15 is often described as the *protoevangelium*, the first gospel. We read these

verses with the benefit of the New Testament. We know how the story plays out in the person of Jesus Christ. The author of Genesis didn't have the benefit of the New Testament; he didn't know how the story would play out. But he knew that evil would be defeated through the seed of the woman, at the end of a long story of enmity between two lines of humanity.

The rest of the Bible is the outworking of these two verses, tracing both the enmity between the two lines and the generation of the woman's seed. Five times in the rest of this series on Genesis 1-11 we'll encounter the contrast between the two lines. Again and again we are shown that there are two ways of living life: Satan's way or God's way, walking as the serpent in paths of wickedness or walking with God in paths of righteousness. This will be shown in the contrast between Cain and Abel (Gen 4), between Lamech and Enoch (Gen 4-5), between the Nephilim born to the daughters of men by the sons of God and Noah (Gen 6:1-8), between Ham and his brothers Shem and Japheth (Gen 9:20-27), and between Eber's sons Yoktan and Peleg (Gen 10:25). It's a theme that we will revisit several times. The two lines persist beyond the end of Genesis 11, all the way through the Bible.

A major theme of the book of Genesis is the development of the woman's seed or offspring; the word is used 59 times. This word *seed* or *offspring* is as ambiguous in Hebrew as in English. It can be used as a singular or as a collective; it can refer to one or many; it can refer to the next generation or to a far distant one. The Bible uses the term with this full range of flexibility and ambiguity.

The generation of this seed does not get off to a good start. In the next chapter Eve will have two children, but by verse 16 the godly son is dead, murdered by the ungodly son who, under God's curse, has exiled himself from the LORD's presence. Survival of the human race, of the woman's seed, is possible only because God graciously gives a replacement son, Seth. It gets worse: by chapter 6 God is sorry that he ever made mankind in the first place. Undoing creation in the Flood, he wipes out humanity, all save Noah and his family. After the Flood he graciously commits to never do that again, even though mankind remains desperately wicked. He will keep the world and humanity going, ensuring that the woman's offspring will continue.

With Noah's sons God begins to narrow the line. Though all Noah's descendants are the offspring of the woman, not all are the woman's offspring as envisaged in Genesis 3:15. Of Noah's sons God selects Shem, choosing to work in the Shemites. Of Shem's descendants he chooses Abraham in whom to do a new thing. This call of Abraham is where our series in Genesis 1-11 will end. God announces to aged Abraham that he will give him and his barren wife a multitude of offspring, whom he will take into covenant as his people. Henceforth the two lines will be those within and those without this covenant. Within are the children of Abraham as further narrowed through Isaac and Jacob; the people who will become Israel; the people whom he will call to know him as the Lord. Without are the Gentiles whom he allows Satan to deceive into worshiping false gods. But even in Genesis 12 God envisages the day when he will bring those outside inside, when he will bring those far off near, when he will bring the ungodly line into the godly line. He promises Abraham that in him and his offspring the Gentiles will find their blessing. By the end of Genesis God has begun to build a numerous offspring of the woman: the children of Israel. Within this offspring he has singled out the offspring of Judah for special significance. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament there are only two further

developments in this theme of the seed or offspring. The offspring within the offspring, the seed within the seed, already narrowed down to Judah within Israel, is further narrowed to David's line within Judah. Secondly, it becomes increasingly clear that though all Israel has been called into covenant with God, only a small minority actually walk with God; the majority walk in the way of wickedness. Though physically the offspring of Abraham they are spiritually the offspring of the serpent.

The serpent had been told that he would be wounded in the head by the woman's seed. Satan therefore does everything he can to prevent the generation of this line. He adopts a brutal approach. He acts through Pharaoh to destroy all the baby boys born to the Hebrews in Egypt (Exod 1:22). He acts through the wicked queen Athaliah to destroy all the royal princes of Judah (2 Kgs 11:1). He acts through Herod to destroy all the baby boys born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16). But because he is cursed all his efforts come to nothing. God frustrates his efforts by using godly members of the woman's offspring; he uses the midwives in Egypt to preserve Moses from Pharaoh. He uses Athaliah's own daughter Jehoshaba to preserve Joash from her. God even uses the pagan Magi to preserve Jesus from Herod; they are the serpent's offspring who abandon their idolatry to come and worship the true King. Try as he might there was nothing Satan could do to prevent this seed being born. And so in the fullness of time "God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4).

The woman's singular offspring Abraham generated a collective offspring Israel which generated a singular offspring Jesus. This Jesus went into battle against Satan. Satan opposed him, arousing the Jews and Gentiles to enter into an unholy alliance to kill this final seed. But therein lay Satan's defeat. Though Jesus was killed by humanity under the power of Satan, this was Satan's undoing. Jesus was dead; Satan had succeeded in killing the seed, even the Son of God. But Death had no claim on Jesus for he had done nothing deserving of death. For the first time there was in the grave one who did not deserve to be there. Therefore God raised him to new life, proclaiming the defeat of death, of sin, and of Satan.

Then, wonder of wonders, God extends to his enemies the gift of new life in Christ Jesus. In the Old Testament God was at work in the nation of Israel, while allowing the Gentiles to be deceived under the power of Satan. But now in Christ he extends salvation to these Gentiles also, to Jew and Gentile alike. It matters not whom you are; God extends salvation to all peoples. It is not his friends that he saves but his enemies.

Our Scripture reading was drawn from Romans 5. Christ died not for the godly but for the ungodly (Rom 5:6). This had to be so for he alone is the seed of the woman; he alone walked righteously with God. We all are the seed of the serpent, walking in unrighteousness. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Paul goes on to show how the one obedient man Jesus has undone the disaster of the one disobedient man Adam. He has undone it in a very lopsided way. The one disobedient act of Adam was enough to plunge the entire human race into condemnation and death. But the righteous act of the one man Jesus counteracts all sin, resulting in life for all.

**For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:19)**

Satan and the power of evil, already cursed to futility in Genesis 3:14, have been defeated in the crucifixion and resurrection of the

Lord Jesus Christ. But God has not yet removed Satan from the scene. He still allows Satan to operate, but within more circumspect limits than ever. He has been bound more tightly. We still await the day of his final doom, when he is removed from having any further influence on earth. In the meantime God is still at work frustrating his purposes, only much more so now than in the Old Testament. Christ is at work plundering Satan's kingdom, liberating the captives, redeeming the serpent's offspring. Transferring them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, God is adopting them as his offspring to walk with him in righteousness. There is nothing Satan can do about it. This is the power of the gospel.

In cursing the serpent God announced the humiliation of evil. But the remarkable thing is that he defeated evil through the humiliation of his own Son. Satan grasped after what was not his, and, through the serpent, seduced the woman and the man to grasp after what was not theirs, namely equality with God. Therefore God cast them out. But God's Son voluntarily gave up and did not grasp what had always been his, namely equality with God. He emptied and humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him.

In God's wisdom he allowed evil to pour itself out fully upon his Son, but it thereby exhausted itself. God has conquered evil by drawing all evil onto his Son.

What wisdom once devised the plan  
Where all our sin and pride  
Was placed upon the perfect Lamb  
Who suffered, bled, and died?  
The wisdom of a Sovereign God  
Whose greatness will be shown  
When those who crucified Your Son  
Rejoice around Your throne.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of darkness dawns world redemption. What grace and mercy that the success of this plan does not depend upon the cooperation of the first man and woman, for they were unwilling to admit their mistakes. Arising entirely from God's initiative it depends upon his love, first for his Son, then for the seed of the woman, and even for the seed of the serpent.

*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 9:15; 1 Cor 15:57)*

1. Bob Kauflin, *The Glory of the Cross* (2002).

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