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Genesis 3:20-24

Thirteenth Message

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# EXILE

SERIES: OUR STORY OF ORIGINS

This past week the world has been celebrating the bicentennial of the birth of Charles Darwin, born on February 12, 1809. This year also marks the sesquicentennial of the publication of his most famous book, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin has given the world a story of origins that has gained widespread support. Several of you work in biotech. Your work demonstrates the reality of Darwin's basic mechanism: natural selection by the survival of the fittest. You observe micro-evolution in the laboratory. But there are many things which Darwin's theory of origins cannot explain.

I have entitled this series on Genesis 1–11 *Our Story of Origins*. This is the story of origins that God gave to Israel, and it remains the story of origins for the church today. I read these early chapters of Genesis as a polemic against the theories of origins of Israel's surrounding cultures: Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Canaanite, each of whom had their stories of the origins of the gods, of the cosmos, and of mankind. These chapters still serve a polemic purpose today. But I don't think they are a polemic against Darwin's "scientific" theories; that is to say, I don't read Genesis 1–11 as a scientific document giving us an alternative to Darwinian evolution. Rather, it gives us an alternative to the strict materialism of Darwinism. Because Darwin's theories are strictly materialistic they fail to explain the non-material within the universe. But it is these non-materialistic matters that are the most important. These are the big questions of life: why is there good and evil? Why are people altruistic, that is, why do people do good things when it does not benefit them personally? How will it all end up? Darwinian evolution can offer only the selfish gene, an answer that is deeply unsatisfying.

An example of these deeper questions is that of pain, which we looked at last week. Pain does have a materialistic component, but there is much about pain that is non-materialistic. Receptors generate impulses and send them along neural pathways, but ultimately pain is in the mind and cannot be fully explained on merely materialistic grounds.

Many of you told me that last week's message on pain was exactly what you needed to hear. Pain is not a popular sermon topic. Church marketing experts tell us we should preach sermons that leave you feeling positive and upbeat. Yet we all deal with pain. Pain is a fact of life in this fallen world, and it remains a present reality for Christians. But God, who inflicted the pain in the first place, is at work using pain to accomplish much good.

Genesis 3 gives us the Biblical perspective on why the world is in such a mess. It addresses issues that Darwinian evolution cannot address. It gives us the divine perspective on what went wrong. Today we come to the end of the chapter. These last five verses are no more upbeat than last week's verses on pain, for here we find the man and the woman expelled from God's presence, driven out of his sanctuary. We continue to deal with matters outside the scope of Darwinian theory. Sadly they are also outside the scope of much Christian

teaching, which has reduced spiritual life to the materialistic realm of health, wealth and prosperity.

Our five verses today fall into two parts. The first two verses (20-21) describe the human and divine responses to judgment. The last three verses (22-24) describe God's expulsion of the humans from his garden sanctuary.

## Responses of Hope (3:20-21)

The first two verses (20-21) form the conclusion to the judgment scene (14-21). After the divine sentencing we are given first the human response (20) and then the divine response (21). Both responses are hopeful. First the human response:

**Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. (Gen 3:20 TNIV)**

In passing judgment upon both the serpent and the woman, the LORD had implied that the woman would have offspring. Even though death had entered the world, God would graciously allow life to continue. The man responds in faith and hope by naming his wife Eve (*Chava*), meaning "living." The woman is given a second identity. Hitherto she has been called "the woman," a female human ("his wife" is simply "his woman"). Now she is given a name.

In the debate about the role of women in the church, the complementarian side argues that the man's naming of his wife shows his authority over her, both here and when she was first brought to him (2:23). But that earlier verse does not use the standard naming formula. After the man had looked into the face of each animal and found no face-to-face match, God brought the woman to him. He immediately recognized the match and exclaimed that the whole world would recognize it too: "of this one it will be said 'woman' because from 'man' was taken this one." He was simply stating that there would be universal recognition that she is a feminine form of him. Man and woman, *ish* and *ishah*, together constitute the human. Here in 3:20 the man does use a standard naming formula, but to argue that this shows his authority over the woman is, I think, to place a weight upon the verse that it is not intended to carry.

The significance of the naming is given by the narrator's editorial comment: "because she would become the mother of all living." Her identity as "woman" expressed her *origin*: she was built from the man as a female match for him, complementing him as a face-to-face equal. Her name Eve or Chava expresses her *destiny*: to be the mother of all the living. Though death has entered the world and though the man and the woman will die and return to the dust, life will continue through Eve. Most importantly, the seed will be born through Eve—this seed that God will use to oppose Satan and ultimately to defeat evil. In the fullness of time God would send his Son, "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). The man's naming of his wife as Eve is an expression of hope and faith in God's word.

This hopeful response from the man is followed by a hopeful action by God:

**The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (3:21)**

The serpent had promised the woman that when she and her husband ate the fruit their eyes would be opened. He was right: their eyes were opened, but the results were terrifying. The first thing they *saw* was each other's nakedness. The first thing they *knew* was that they were naked. The first thing they *did* was to attempt to hide their nakedness. Their skimpy fig-leaf aprons might have been enough to hide their nakedness from each other but they weren't enough to face God. They had tried to hide from God amidst all the trees in the garden, perhaps hoping that the abundance of leaves would hide them more effectively than a few fig leaves sewn together. But God had summoned them out into the open to face him. The problem wasn't simply that they were naked—they had always been naked. The problem was that now they were naked in a sinful state. The garden was God's sanctuary; it was holy space. God's presence made it such. God had made the man and the woman to dwell there in his sanctuary. But now they were unfit residents. God deals with this unfitness by discarding the skimpy coverings they had made, replacing them with more adequate garments of his own manufacture.

Clothing is richly symbolic. Even though our society has become much less formal, clothing still has symbolic meaning. For example, judges and many ministers wear robes, signifying their office. The word "investiture" is derived from the verb "to clothe." God divests Adam and Eve of their self-manufactured garments and invests them with garments of his own manufacture. Adam and Eve were tarnished by sin. No garments that they could make would ever be adequate to cover themselves in God's presence. If they were to have adequate garments God would have to make them; and he did. Sinful humans have to be adequately covered if they are to appear in God's presence in his sanctuary. This divestiture and investiture is a theme that will be repeated throughout Scripture, as we'll see.

### Exile (3:22-24)

Even though God has provided the man and woman with more adequate garments they are still sinful and thus no longer fit to dwell in God's sanctuary. The final scene is therefore their expulsion from that sanctuary:

**And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove them out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (3:22-24)**

Again the serpent had been right. It had promised the woman that if she and the man ate the fruit they would "be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). What the serpent had promised had happened. But contrary to the woman's expectation this was not a good thing. God had not intended for the humans to be like him, knowing good and evil. He had made them to know the good, to accept on faith that which he declared to be good. They had no need of any other knowledge of good, and they certainly had no need of the knowledge of evil. But the serpent had deceived the woman to act with autonomy, without reference to God. She had made her own determination

of the good, but this was evil in God's eyes. Such knowledge of good and evil was the preserve of God and those with him, by which he probably means the heavenly council surrounding his throne.

The danger now is that the man and woman would eat also of the tree of life, and live forever in a fallen state. It is not that God does not want the man and woman to live forever, but that he does not want them to live forever in their current state. Because they are no longer fit for his sanctuary and in order to prevent their access to the tree of life, God expels them from the garden. This is stated twice for emphasis: he sent them away and he expelled them.

This scene marks an undoing of the first scene of life in the garden in chapter 2. God made the man from the dust of the ground, but he did not intend for him to make his living working the ground. Instead he planted a garden in the east in Eden. Numerous aspects of the garden make it clear that this was God's sanctuary. It was here, in the very best place on earth, in paradise, in his sanctuary, that God settled the man. Here he was to work and to keep, to serve and to guard. These were noble callings, the callings of a priest serving in the sanctuary. The work or service was not toil; it was not for the purpose of producing his livelihood. God provided everything he needed for life. God ensured that the garden was well-watered and full of trees. God encouraged the man to freely enjoy the great bounty that he had provided. God gave the man the noble calling of guarding this sanctuary, of keeping its sanctity.

But now everything is lost. The vocabulary of the first scene is repeated in order to emphasize this. God had settled the man in the garden of Eden; now he expels him from the garden of Eden. The man was to work the garden, serving in the sanctuary; now he must work the ground outside the garden. This work will be painful toil until eventually he crumbles back into the dust from which he was taken. The man was to enjoy the bounty of God's provision; now he must work for his provision. He was to guard the garden but now he has forfeited this calling. He is replaced as guardian by the cherubim.

These cherubim are not the chubby infants of Raphael's art. Ancient Near Eastern art depicted them as winged lions with human heads; that is, as winged sphinxes. They had a dual role: to guard the sanctity of holy places and to serve as throne attendants. Their presence here confirms that the garden was God's sanctuary, his earthly throne room. They guard this garden sanctuary against the sinful humans and block their access to the tree of life.

The LORD had planted a garden in the east; it's still there at the end of chapter 3 but now in the east are the cherubim and a whirling flaming sword blocking entrance to the garden. Humanity is expelled to wander east of Eden exiled from God, from home and from eternity.

This account of the garden of Eden began so well, with such great promise. God created humans to live in his sanctuary, to enjoy his presence. Life was very simple and straightforward: they were to live by simple faith in his word. This word was not difficult. God provided everything they needed. Human life was full of dignity and honor. Here in paradise humanity was to glorify God and enjoy him forever. But in just 46 verses it's all over. God himself expels humanity from his presence to scratch a living in painful toil east of Eden.

That's how serious sin is. Sin is not just a little mistake that can be papered over. Sin is a rejection of how God created the cosmos. Sin is our assertion that we can be like God. The problem is that we're not God. We didn't create the cosmos. Apart from God's word we don't

know what is good. When we act in our own best judgment, on our own authority, we will inevitably make poor choices which have unintended consequences. Because of sin God has expelled humanity into exile from home and from himself.

### Bringing Humanity Back Home

Fortunately, this is not the end of the story. We're only on page 3, but the Bible has a thousand pages. The rest of the Bible is the story of what God does to rescue humanity from the calamity of this chapter. It will take until the third last chapter of the Bible to deal with the problems arising in this third chapter. In that third last chapter, Revelation 20, God removes all evil from the earth: Satan, his followers, and death. They are thrown into the lake of fire, which is the dead end to which God consigned Satan when he cursed him (Gen 3:14).

But the removal of evil from the earth is not the final goal. It is a necessary way point on the path to the final goal. The final goal is to restore humanity to God's presence, to live with him in his sanctuary, where we can again glorify him and enjoy him forever. This is what humanity was created for. This restoration of mankind to God's sanctuary is a major theme of the Bible.

The story of this restoration does not get off to a promising start. In the next few chapters the story goes from bad to worse. Wandering east of Eden, humanity wanders further and further away from God, descending deeper and deeper into sin and rebellion. In the next eight chapters it becomes abundantly clear that the natural direction of mankind living away from God is downwards not upwards. Cain and Abel, the sons of God and the daughters of men, the Tower of Babel: these stories show that sin is endemic and progressive. There is no upward evolution in human behavior. By chapter 11 it has become clear that mankind is without the ability to find its way back home, back to God. It has become clear that if there is to be any hope the initiative must come from God. And this is exactly what God does. He takes the initiative in calling Abraham, who was no better than anyone else. To Abraham and his descendants he made the promise, "I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you." This promise expresses the heart of God's purpose: that humanity be his people and that they dwell with him.

When the LORD redeemed Abraham's descendants from Egypt he brought them to Mt Sinai where he formally took them to be his people, binding them to himself in covenant, and again expressing his purpose: "I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you." Since the people were not yet fit to be brought into his sanctuary, God did the next best thing. He put a symbolic copy of his sanctuary in the midst of the people. He had the people build him a tabernacle where he might dwell in their midst. This is such a high point that the last third of the book of Exodus is devoted to describing it in great detail: seven chapters of instructions on how to build the sanctuary, followed by six chapters of near-verbatim repetition describing its actual construction. Sadly we tend to hit the fast forward button at that point. The great detail shows the importance of this tabernacle in God's purposes: he was putting his presence in the midst of his people. In between the instructions and the construction lies the sorry episode of the golden calf. But even this heinous sin would not deter God from his intent to have his people dwell with him.

Since the tabernacle was God's sanctuary, it included guardian cherubim. Their images were woven into the curtains that hung in

the Holy Place and that formed the entrance veil to the Most Holy Place. Here in the Most Holy Place, God put the glory-cloud of his presence. Here he was symbolically enthroned atop the ark of the covenant between two solid gold cherubim who were his symbolic throne attendants.

Along with the detailed instructions for the tabernacle, God gave detailed instructions for the garments to be made for the priests. Moses was to invest Aaron and his sons with these garments to hide their nakedness when they entered God's presence.

All these careful instructions were to teach Israel that though God was putting his presence amidst his people he could not be approached lightly. Sin remained a major problem limiting access to God. Outside the tent was the altar where sacrifices were offered morning and evening to atone for Israel's sin. Only once a year could one man pass through the veil with its woven cherubim and enter God's throne room. He had to be clothed aright and he had to take in the blood of atonement to make atonement for the sins of all the people.

The tabernacle was holy space, but it was erected in the middle of the desert where little grew. Though God provided food and water for his people in the desert, the destination he had planned for them was a land flowing with milk and honey. In several passages it is clear that the land of Israel, the Promised Land, was to be a restoration of the garden of Eden. The whole land was a sanctuary, the Holy Land as we still call it though no longer with any justification. Here the king, who was God's earthly representative, built for God a more permanent sanctuary, the Temple. It had the same symbolism as the tabernacle. Cherubim were carved on the walls of the Holy Place and on the entrance door to the Most Holy Place. There in the Most Holy Place the glory-cloud representing God's presence was enthroned between two cherubim.

Yet despite all these gracious acts on God's part, putting his presence amidst his people, Israel persisted in its sin. Though God put up with sin for a long time, he finally had enough. He removed his presence from the temple, and expelled his people from the land. Just as Adam and Eve had been expelled out the east side of the garden of Eden back into the ground from which they had been taken, so now the Israelites were expelled out the east side of the Promised Land back to godless Mesopotamia from which they had been taken so long before. Mankind dwelling in the garden sanctuary had been undone by their sin. Israel dwelling in the sanctuary of the Promised Land had been undone by their sin. What hope is there? What would God have to do to restore mankind to his presence?

We have the benefit of the New Testament which shows the great lengths to which God has gone to restore sinful humanity to himself. At the moment of Christ's death the temple veil was torn in two, from top to bottom (Matt 27:51). This was the curtain, embroidered with cherubim, that hung between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. No longer did the cherubim guard the way into God's presence. As the writer to the Hebrews shows in several places, Christ has passed through the veil and entered once for all into the holy sanctuary of God's presence. Since the ascended Jesus remains human, for the first time God brought a human back into his true sanctuary. Jesus was fit for God's presence because he was without sin. He has gone there as "our forerunner...on our behalf" (Heb 6:20). We too will follow, but we must be made without sin to be fit for God's presence.

The New Testament uses the language of clothing to symbolize this being made fit for God's presence. We divest ourselves of our old self and are invested with our new self (Eph 4:22-25; Col 3:8-12). The New Testament uses this language of investiture for both Spirit and Christ: we are clothed with the Spirit of power (Luke 24:49) and we are clothed with Christ (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). In Christ God has dealt with the problem of sin. He removes the filthy rags of our sin and clothes us with Christ, through whom we who were far off have been brought near. He clothes us with his Spirit to make us holy and thus fit for his presence.

The end of the story lies in the last two chapters of the Bible. The new heavens and new earth are portrayed as both the temple-city and the garden. Both are images of God's sanctuary in which his people dwell with him. In the garden sanctuary stands the tree of life to which mankind once again has full access. Here we will glorify God and enjoy him forever. There are no cherubim blocking access to God. The cherubim, known in Revelation as the four living creatures, are still the symbolic throne attendants of God. They lead the heavenly chorus of praise. And there joining in are humans whom Christ has redeemed to be his people.

Sin is a serious matter. Darwinian evolution offers neither an explanation nor a solution for sin. Sin is not part of its vocabulary. Sadly, sin is not part of the vocabulary of too many churches. But sin is a reality, as we're all aware. We wander in a far country until, like the lost son, we come to our senses and turn back home. The Hebrew word for repentance is *shuv*, to turn around and head back in the other direction. When the lost son turned around he found a father eager to embrace him, to clothe him with the best robe, and to call for a feast. "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

We've spent five weeks in this third chapter of Genesis. It's not been pleasant reading but it's been necessary reading, for this gives us our story of origins to account for the human condition. Without this we cannot understand what God has been up to and what his purposes are. Though God has driven humanity into exile, he says, "I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you." By his grace he brings us to our senses and brings us home, back from exile.

*To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)*

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