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Genesis 2:4–3:24

Second Message

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ADAM, WHERE ARE YOU?

SERIES: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE NEW, AND THE PERFECT

Last week we saw that God created a world that was very good. But as we look around ourselves today, we do not see a world that is very good. We see a world that is very much out of kilter. The physical world is out of kilter: within the past few weeks we've seen a devastating earthquake in Turkey, another earthquake in Greece, and most recently Hurricane Floyd, which wreaked such havoc in the Bahamas and on the east coast. Even more so in the human world do we see that all is not well on planet earth: seven shot at a church in Fort Worth; two shot at a hospital in Los Angeles; yet more bombs in Moscow; thousands killed and hundreds of thousands forced to flee in East Timor. What has happened? How has the good become the bad?

Many diagnoses are offered. Hurricanes, droughts and floods are blamed on El Niño, on La Niña, or on global warming. Catastrophes in the human arena are blamed on excessive government or on insufficient government, on over-indulgent welfare or on insufficient welfare, on proliferation of guns or on gun control, on arms sales to governments or on arms sales to rebels. The bloodshed in Timor is blamed on the island being united when it should be divided, but bloodshed in Ireland is blamed on that island being divided when it should be united. There is tremendous confusion about what is wrong and why it is wrong. Amidst all the babble of the experts I find that one diagnosis continues to ring clear, that provided by Genesis 3. This chapter still provides the only adequate explanation of the wrong that we see around us. Genesis 3 gives us an account of the first act of sin by the first humans, of the consequences of that sin for the humans, and of God's response to this first act of rebellion. But I want to start our analysis of this event with a look at Genesis 2 which describes the setting in which that sin took place.

We saw last week that Genesis is divided into an introduction (1:1–2:3) plus ten major sections by the repeated heading that begins "The account of..." The first of these sections is 2:4–4:26. These three chapters are to be read together. Chapter 2 describes the environment within which the events of chapter 3 took place. This is an important point for it runs counter to much of the accepted wisdom of the world. Current wisdom says that if only you provide man with a good environment he will behave himself. Man's misdemeanors are not to be labeled sin, and are certainly not to be blamed on anything wrong with man, but on the inadequacy of his environment. This may be politically correct, but it is not Biblically correct. Genesis 2–3 show us that the first sin was committed in the very best environment on earth.

Chapter one showed how God carefully formed and filled this earth to be a suitable habitation for his creatures. He made the birds to live in the sky, the fish to live in the sea, the animals to live on the land. But where is man to live? We are told that man

is to rule over the birds that live in the sky, over the fish that live in the sea, and over the animals that live on the land, but we are not told where man himself is to live. This is what chapter 2 tells us. Imagine chapters 1-2 as a movie. In chapter one the camera is positioned 100,000 miles out in space so that the earth fills the screen. We watch as a formless empty ball is formed and filled. In chapter 2 the camera zooms in to look at a particular place on earth, and we are shown God crafting a suitable home for man, his earthly representative.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:4-9 NIV)

"The LORD God planted a garden." How the word "garden" fills us with delight. The busier and more dislocated we get the more we seem to long for a garden. But at the same time we build ever larger houses on ever smaller lots. We have no room for gardens, and if we do we have no time to look after them. But that doesn't stop our yearning for them. The mere mention of the word is enough to evoke a longing in us. Six weeks ago, Sue and I moved into our first house. It is a small house on a large lot, with a lovely garden. We love sitting outside, and working in the garden. It's an oasis within the urban jungle of Silicon Valley.

The habitation that God designed for man was a garden. The Hebrew word for garden is *gan*; one of our wineries here in California is called Gan Eden, Garden of Eden. This word *gan* originally denoted a place that was enclosed, protected. It was, quite literally, paradise, for our word "paradise" derives from an Ancient Near Eastern word made up of two components, *pairi* "around" and *daeza* "wall." You might be thinking of the enclosed garden described in the book and movie, *The Secret Garden*. But the Ancient Near Eastern imagery is of a royal hunting preserve. Common also in medieval Europe, a few of these still survive there, such as Fontainebleau outside Paris. The garden of Genesis

2 is planted by God himself. Ezekiel 28:13 describes it as “the garden of God.” It is God’s sanctuary on earth. It is planted in Eden, which means Delight. Elsewhere it is called the holy mountain of God (Ezek 28:14). In symbolic terms this garden was the cosmic mountain, the meeting place of heaven and earth.

The sanctuary imagery is continued in 2:10-14. From this garden flows a river, dividing into four streams. This is the river of life, flowing from God’s sanctuary to fructify all the surrounding land.

Where did God want man to live? In paradise, in God’s garden, on the holy mount of God, in God’s own sanctuary on earth. God places Adam in this sanctuary and gives him a job description:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (2:15-17)

Adam has already been commissioned to be a king, ruling God’s kingdom on his behalf. Now he is commissioned to be a priest, faithfully serving God in his garden. As God’s gardener he is to work the garden and to guard it. And then he is to party, to feast abundantly in God’s presence. God had filled the garden with a great variety of trees, all of them pleasing to the eye and good for food. God does not say, “If you get really hungry it’s OK to eat one or two fruit, but make sure you don’t take too many. These are my trees and my fruit.” No, he tells Adam to take all he wants. In Hebrew, God is quite emphatic that Adam is to eat of these trees. But God does impose a single limit: there is one tree that is off limits, and God is equally emphatic that Adam will die if he eats of that tree.

God provides the man with a woman to be his companion and helper. The chapter closes with the two of them in blissful happiness, at peace with one another, with God, and with the world. But trouble is lurking in the trees. This bliss and peace is about to be shattered.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (3:1-7)

In 3:1 we encounter a snake. We are told nothing about the origins of this snake other than that it was created by God. Again the Bible is silent on matters which we would like to know a lot about. I do agree with those who believe that Satan was working in or through this snake. The Bible says little about Satan, about his origins, about his Fall; it tells us much less than some people want to make the Bible say about him. I think that one of the reasons that Scripture is relatively silent on Satan is to prevent us falling into a belief that is common to man-made religion, the belief in two equal and opposite gods, a god of good and a god of bad. Focus enough attention on Satan and you run that danger. Satan is not an equal and opposite force to God. God is sovereign, Satan is not. So Scripture focuses our attention on God. Suffice it for the moment to say that Satan was probably an archangel, one of the chief angels, who grasped after equality with God and was thrown out of heaven. Ever since he has been implacably opposed to God’s purposes.

The snake proceeds to speak. As Don Francisco wrote in the song Pat sang for us earlier, “The master of deception now begins with his dissection of the word.” God had given his word to Adam. It was a simple command, easily obeyed. It involved little hardship because the garden was filled with thousands of trees, and Adam had been told to eat as much as he liked from any of them except one. The snake, or Satan, dissects God’s word in three stages.

The serpent begins his attack by questioning the veracity of God’s word, “Did God really say...?” The woman responds by repeating God’s command, showing that Adam has instructed her concerning the command. The serpent then intensifies his attack. From merely casting doubt on God’s word, he now outright contradicts it: “you will not surely die.” Then he goes a step further, telling the woman that God is a spoil-sport: “He doesn’t want you to eat the fruit because he doesn’t want you to be like him.”

Let’s take a step back and see what the serpent, and ultimately Satan, are doing here. God has placed man in paradise, the best place on earth. Here he has provided him with tremendous bounty and with the freedom to enjoy all that God has given him. It is all very good: thousands of things are permitted, and only one thing is forbidden. But Satan focuses attention on the one thing denied. This becomes the focus of the woman’s attention till she loses sight of all else. The serpent wants her to forget that every other tree in the garden is also pleasing to the eye and good for food. Secondly, the serpent persuades the woman that she needs to have this one thing now. Thirdly, she owes it to herself to take it now in order to make herself more complete. God is denying her this one thing because he doesn’t want her to attain to her full womanhood. Fourthly, the serpent persuades the woman to evaluate the fruit through her eyes rather than through her ears. Her eyes see that the fruit is good, while her ear is closed to God’s prohibition. The serpent’s attack is so comprehensive that the woman succumbs and eats of the fruit.

What I find so scary about this is that the serpent’s methods are the same as those used today by the advertising industry. Madison Avenue wants you to forget the rich bounty you already have; there is one more thing you need, and you need it now. Moreover, you owe it to yourself to make yourself more com-

plete. You deserve it and those who might withhold it from you are spoil-sports. While reason might be telling you not to take it, Madison Avenue appeals to your sight: forget what the others are saying, just look...and take.

This is also the way that temptation works today. Satan still uses the same methods. He wants to detract us from the bounty God has given us to enjoy, and focus our attention on the one thing forbidden. When you understand this, you can plot a course of defense. Take lust for example. When Satan tries to persuade me that another woman is good, I should remind myself of the rich bounty that God has given me in my spouse.

Behind the specific act of taking and eating the fruit lay the one basic sin that has remained unchanged since the garden: the woman decided what was right in her own eyes. In doing so she ignored what God had said was right in his eyes. God wanted her to live by faith in his word; Satan wanted her to live by sight. God wanted her to abide by his decision as to what was good; Satan wanted her to exercise moral autonomy.

Does this mean that I am laying all the blame on the woman? Where was the man? He is strikingly absent from the text, but we find at the end of 3:6 that he is beside the woman. He has presumably been there all along, the archetypal passive male. But man had been commissioned to guard the garden. As guardian of God's sanctuary he should have responded immediately to a creature that misused God's words. He should have stepped in and silenced this mis-speaking animal. But the man is passive, and willingly eats of the fruit the woman passes him.

The serpent was right. When the first couple ate the fruit their eyes were opened and they became like God, knowing good and evil, as God himself acknowledges in 3:22. In making their own decision as to what was good, man set himself up as God. As sovereign Creator, God had the ability to decide what was good, but he did not give man, his creature, the ability to do likewise, to independently decide what is good. When man arrogates to himself the ability to declare what is good, he functions as God.

Satan was right in saying that man would be like God, but the couple quickly finds that this freedom is terrifying. Suddenly aware of their nakedness, they make skimpy coverings to hide their nakedness from one another. Afraid of each other, they find that they are also afraid of God:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

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

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (3:8-13)

In their fear, the man and the woman hide not only from themselves, but also from God. God comes after them, but they misinterpret his motives. God asked, "Where are you?" but he knew full where they were. He asked this to give the man a chance to 'fess up. But man passes the buck and blames the woman whom God provided for him. The woman blames the serpent. And so it has always been. Though we know that confession and repentance are the path to forgiveness, reconciliation and freedom, we persist in blaming others.

The man has blamed the woman, and the woman has blamed the serpent. When God gets to the end of the chain he begins to pronounce judgment, speaking to the participants in the reverse order, first the serpent, then the woman, then the man. He pronounces judgment on all three participants, though he blames only the serpent and the man. But mixed in with the words of judgment we find the dawn of redemption. The cloud of judgment is tinged with the silver lining of grace.

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

**"Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the 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." (3:14-15)**

God's judgment upon the serpent is a curse. We instinctively know that this is not a positive word, but would have difficulty defining it. The verb "curse" is the opposite of "bless" which we encountered last week. The best way I have found of explaining these words is in terms of success and failure. When God blesses someone, he ensures he will be successful. But when God curses someone, he ensures that he will be unsuccessful; he consigns that person to futility. In cursing the serpent, God consigns him to futility. God makes every effort to pursue man, but he makes no effort to pursue the serpent redemptively. Broadening the scope, we can say that God makes no effort to redeem Satan. Instead, he immediately consigns Satan to futility. This is very good news, because it means that no matter how hard Satan tries to thwart God's purposes he will ultimately be unsuccessful.

Secondly, the serpent had managed to persuade the woman that he, the serpent, was her friend and that God was the enemy. But God made mankind to be his friend not his enemy. He announces that he will redraw the boundary lines, putting enmity between the woman and the serpent, between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed. Ultimately there will be a showdown between the two seeds in which the seed of the woman will receive a severe blow but the seed of the serpent will be mortally wounded. Much of the rest of the Bible can be read as the story of these two seeds.

God turns from the serpent to address the woman and then the man:

To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food

until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;

for dust you are

and to dust you will return.” (3:16-19)

God had created man and woman for an idyllic life within the garden. But God’s judgment on them is to inflict pain and toil. Woman is subjected to pain in the home: in the bearing and raising of children, and in her marital relationship. Man is subjected to pain in his work. Henceforth he will have to struggle to make a living. No longer will he be able to pluck his food from the great bounty of God’s garden. God curses the ground, ensuring that it will not give up its food without a struggle.

But here, too, we have a silver lining. We regard pain as a great evil, but pain is also positive, and I don’t mean just in the sense, “no pain, no gain.” Paul Brand was a missionary doctor in India, specializing in the treatment of leprosy. In his books *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, *In His Image*, and *Pain: the Gift Nobody Wants*, he writes that what his leprosy patients most wanted was the ability to feel pain.¹ Leprosy attacks the body’s nervous system so that sufferers of that disease are unable to feel pain. “Hallelujah!” you might say. But the leprosy sufferers see it differently. Pain is an indication that something is wrong. Unable to feel pain, lepers damage their bodies.

Pain is a gracious gift from God. How so? God does not want us to find our ultimate fulfillment here on earth. He does not want women to find their ultimate fulfillment bearing and raising children, or in their relationship with their husbands. He does not want men to find their ultimate fulfillment in their work.

God could have wiped mankind off the face of the earth and started over again. Or he could have cursed man, consigning him to futility, to the same end that awaits Satan. But God does not curse mankind. Though he passes judgment on mankind it is a judgment laced with grace. It is grace that is much in evidence in the closing verses of the chapter.

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 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 for ever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man 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. (3:20-24)

God’s grace is evident in three ways in these verses: Firstly, in the continuation of life. Though death has entered the world and mankind is subject to it, God will ensure that life continues. In faith, therefore, Adam names his wife Eve, meaning “living,” because he understands that she will be the mother of all human life. Secondly, God takes away Adam and Eve’s inadequate garments and gives them new garments of his own making. Thirdly, God banishes Adam and Eve from the garden. How is this a sign of grace? God is concerned lest man live forever in a fallen, rebellious state. Man is banished from the garden and from the tree of life for his own good. But it is not an eternal banishment. God has made man for the garden and is determined to restore him to the garden. At the end of Revelation we see that man once again has access to the tree of life. But before he is given that access, God has to redeem him, has to reverse the consequences of the Fall.

Do you feel pain? Do you feel that you are toiling amidst the thorns and thistles? Does work fail to satisfy you? Does your husband fail to meet your expectations? Do your kids frustrate you? Do you lie awake in the middle of the night thinking “there has to be more to life than this”? Are you looking for “the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noontide heat and the burden of the day”?

Good. These feelings are indications that we are not made for life wandering east of Eden. God has not made you to find your fulfillment in work or in family. He has not even made you to find your fulfillment in church work or in ministry. He’s made you to find your fulfillment in himself alone. We are made for life in the garden, in God’s sanctuary. God has made us for himself and we will be restless till we find our rest in him. The big question is, “How do we get back to the garden?” But for that, you’ll have to wait till next week. For now I’ll leave you with the question, “Adam, Where are you?”

1. Paul Brand with Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), and *Pain: the Gift Nobody Wants* (HarperCollins, 1993).