

The Promise: Genesis 3:13-21, Galatians 3:26-4:7

Ever since he had come to live with them, Grandpa and 5-year-old Johnny had become fast friends. So when Grandpa died, Johnny knew something significant had happened.

In those days the open casket was put on display in the living room or parlor of the home (not in funeral homes like they are today) and folks would stop in to pay their respects to the family of the departed. Everyday Johnny would come into the parlor to visit Grandpa's casket, lingering there gently touching Grandpa's arm as Mom & Dad tried to explain death to him.

Then came the day of the funeral; the casket was closed and grandpa was transported to his grave. Johnny standing at the edge of the open pit, looked down into the hole that would hold the casket and looking up to his Mom he asked: "*how is grandpa ever going to get out of there?*"

Inside of each one of us there is the deep seated feeling that ... death isn't right! Death isn't natural and the Bible agrees.

Scripture teaches that we were NOT created to die. We weren't made just to live out a short life... and then inhabit a grave for eternity. It's not the way things should have been. Somehow Johnny intuitively knew that and so do we.

Thus the question before us today is, knowing that we were somehow meant to live forever and yet witnessing death all around us, what went wrong? And what hope do we have that someday everything will again be put right?

Paul wrote these words to the church:

"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.. "I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Since Paul has already answered the last of our questions for us: It is Christ Jesus who came to put things right. It was Christ Jesus who provided what we intuitively knew to had be a way for us to live beyond the grave, forever, with our Lord. So all that now remains to be answered is learn what had gone so wrong at first that it required God

Himself to come down to the Earth to live as a human and to personally pay the price – His own physical death – in order to set things right for the rest of us. For answer that question we need to go back to the Garden of Eden where not necessarily physical death but certainly spiritual death first entered our world.



After God had created the Earth, all the plants and animals along with humanity, He declared everything “*very good*” and He blessed these first humans telling them to “*be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the Earth.*” God next planted a garden as a home for these first humans in which to live and care for. They were free to do anything they wished with the exception of one negative command; which was not to eat the fruit of one particular “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” For God had warned them that the day they did so, they would immediately die.

The usual assumption is that, at the time Adam and Eve were completely ignorant of the concept of death so that they could not even know what the consequence of “death” might be. But perhaps they did know – at least the idea of physical death – for we see the cycle from birth to death as being a natural part of the life cycle of all plants and animals, which God had originally blessed and which were not part of the later curse, only the ground was cursed and the serpent. So the point is, that physical death was always part of everything’s natural lifecycle.

The same was true for Adam and Eve; their original bodies were meant to one day physically wear out and die, or else they would not have needed the “Tree of Life” – the eating of which would have granted their current physical bodies some form of longevity. Thus even before the fall of A&E this cycle from physical birth to physical death for humans, followed by rebirth to eternal life was apparently always a part of the original plan.

So, as we learned last week, the immediate death that A&E were warned against was not physical but spiritual death which means they would have to be spiritually separated from fellowship with God; because that is what **death means ... “separation.”** And spiritual separation from God is what immediately happened the moment A&E disobeyed God’s one negative command.

While A&E’s spirits – being made in God’s image – were meant to live forever, now as sinners their spirits could no longer do so in fellowship with their sinless creator God – without being spiritually destroyed. But to live eternally yet forever separated from God is the basic definition of **Hell**.

Thus for their own sake our spiritually separated parents also had to also be physically separated from God – ejected from God’s presence and His garden to go live and work elsewhere – until a solution, a rescue plan could be worked out;

Along with their ejection from God's garden and denial of access to a tree that could have granted them a physically eternal yet spiritually separated life, certain aspects of creation were **cursed** – not so much as a way to punish A&E but in the hope of driving them back to recognition of their need for God in their life. Since their act of disobedience had demonstrated their intent to live independent from God, the curses were intended to insure that their independent life would bring hardship and struggle thus pushing these prodigals to come to their senses and yearn for a return home.

Since we had rebelled against our creator's rule, in hopes of our eventual restoration of God had to cause creation to now rebel against our rule.

We will come back to the curse on the serpent, but first let me first explain God's restorative intent behind the rest of the curses he leveled against our first parents.

To the woman GOD said,
'I will greatly increase
your pangs in childbearing;
Genesis 3:16

And to the Man: cursed is the ground
because of you ... thorns and thistles
it shall bring forth for you ...By the
sweat of your face, you shall eat bread.
Genesis 3:17-19

A&E had always been intended to do work as part of their responsibility to care for the Garden. **Work is not part of the curse.** God is always working always creating and so being made in His image we were also designed for work. The difference being that in the garden, labor would be pleasurable, easily rewarding; harvesting fruit from trees God had planted making for easy meals.

Outside the garden A&E would have to plow their own ground, find, gather, and plant their own seed, diligently tending the crop through all the vagaries of weather and predation before harvesting, grinding, and then baking grain for their daily bread; food was no longer guaranteed or easily procured. After their rebellion work would become more difficult, less rewarding.

Pain and suffering for both the man and woman – her in labor to bring forth children and him in labor to bring home food – were also to be a lifelong reminder of the struggle and insecurity of all their efforts apart from God. As a reflection of the fallen humans now trying to rule over it, creation would no longer be blessed, no longer "very

good." In order for our first king and queen to understand the impact of their rebellion against God, their domain would now live in rebellion against them.

Thus, pain, sweat, and suffering were intended to drive us back to God where a restored fellowship would at least help to translate such hardships back to something at least better.... Until the final cure could be applied. That is why Jesus calls to us, '*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*' (Matthew 11:28-30).

While in this cursed world the pain, suffering, and sweat may not be reduced, our restored relationship with God will at least give it purpose and as promised one day a once again "very good" ending.

Next, to the woman God said

Your desire will be **contrary** to your husband but he shall rule over you.
Genesis 3:16 ESV

Let's deal with an additional unexpected consequence of A&E's sin, as illustrated by this part of God's decree. **In their disobedience, A&E were not only now both physically and spiritually separated from God and through the curse equally separated from the rest of creation, but they had also become spiritually separated from each other.**

Just like their separation from God, this was more a result of their own doing and not a part of the curse. We know this because we can see A&E spiritually separating from each other even before God confronted them with their disobedience.

When first presented with the woman Adam welcomed her as his helper/partner declaring her to be "*bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.*" As intended, these two immediately recognized their spiritual unity, their oneness, with each other.

However, following their eating of the tree they felt shame, and guilt. They now felt exposed to each other, no longer fully trusting of each other. Their fig leaf clothing was not for protection against the cold as much as to hide themselves from each other. Even their sexuality which had originally been blessed as part of God's "very good" creation would now function in a fallen world of broken relationships. **Think about this for a moment: Sexuality outside of a Godly relationship leads only to rape, prostitution, pornography, perversion.**

Adam further verbally demonstrated his separation from Eve by immediately blaming her for his guilt and then even blaming God for giving her to him. Thus, as noted in this verse, their spiritual separation from each other would also plague the rest of humanity until that day when what A&E had broken could be repaired.

Notice that this translation, coming from the English Standard Bible is dramatically different from the one in our New Revised Standard version, which reads that woman's desire would be "for" her husband "and" he would rule over her?

Our difficulty in translating some ancient Hebrew words is well illustrated here. The particular word which our Bible translated as "for" can only be found in one other place in the Bible where God warned Cain, that sin was crouching at his door and that its desire was "for" him, but He must master it (Genesis 4:8). So in both these places "desire for" does not mean a desire for relationship, but rather a desire to dominate, to master.

Thus God was saying that A&E would no longer live in complimentary union but rather in conflicted union; each desiring to dominate the other, but by his superior physical strength the man generally winning. And that is the way human history has thereafter shaped itself not the way God had designed it but the way it would now work in a world of broken relationships: competition with the intent to dominate, not only between men and women but also between men and men, and tribes and nations; **By their disobedience, A&E had unintentionally invented the basis of war as soon thereafter proved by Cain, in an act of jealousy and anger killing his brother Abel.**

<p>I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel Genesis 3:15</p>

Now let's deal with the serpent and how God's rescue plan would one day offer humans a way back home, a way back into fellowship with both him and other humans, and especially those living closest to us: our spouses.

We know that the devil used a snake to tempt Eve; the snake was somehow talking with her, but the words and ideas were straight from Satan. So why was the snake cursed? Again the text is not clear. We know that God had originally created "creeping things" along with cattle and other animals (Genesis 1:24). So perhaps the snake had wings or legs and subsequently lost them – there are several Biblical comparisons between snakes and dragons – or perhaps the snake had always crept around, just now it would be a dustier sadder crawl.

But why should the snake have been cursed in any fashion if it was not the one originally responsible for causing A&E's to sin? Again the text is not clear. But this punishment for being an accomplice to sin is consistent with the rest of the Bible which teaches that if an ox kills a human that ox must be put to death. But if it was known that the ox was dangerous and its owner had failed to control it, then both the ox and the owner were to be put to death (Exodus 21:28-31).

However we do know that the rest of the curse, this portion about striking the heel and head, was not pointed at snakes in general but actually prophetically at that ancient serpent also known as Satan or the devil (Revelation 20:2, cf Romans 16:20).

Again our understanding of the ancient Hebrew is not as clear as we would wish. The word used here was also translated as "strike, bruise, or crush" in other contexts. But whatever its meaning the implication is quite clear. That one day Satan, that ancient serpent, would again strike, causing a painful blow, against some future son who was to be born to the woman. But then that same son would retaliate with a deadly blow against his ancient enemy; unlike humans this Satan or the devil would not be allowed to live forever.

And that is how God's rescue plan for his lost children would play out. First God had to deal with the legal consequences of A&E's sin and all the sins committed by their progeny born thereafter. Since the wages of Sin is Death, Christ Jesus, God's sinless son would have to enter our world as a descendant of Adam and Eve; actually as a second Adam having the federal right to rule the earth. Then having lived as an obedient and sinless human, Jesus would offer his life in payment for our sins, by his death our sentence of death would be paid. As Scripture would have us know

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us Galatians 3:13
--

All down through history Satan would war unsuccessfully against this plan to undo the curse, trying to stop the son from being born then trying to kill him after he was born. With Christ's crucifixion he thought he had finally defeated God's rescue plan. But when Christ came back to life three days later, Satan then knew he had only "bruised his heel" Christ's death had been painful but not fatal. And eventually the rest of that original promise will come true, the son of God will crush Satan under his feet when he returns as king of kings and Lord of Lords; it's just a matter of God's timing (Romans 16:20).

But until that time, we have been restored to fellowship with God have left with a message to share; that through faith in what Christ Jesus did on cross, we all – including you - can be forgiven and restored back into full fellowship with God And surprise even with one another.

Think about this: When a man and a woman who both live in a restored relationship with God come together as husband and wife, they can again become spiritually one, as if of one flesh. And in their homes they can recreate a bit of that lost Edenic life. It will take work, because even as Christians we have a lot of sin and death that we need to unlearn, but it is doable so that one day the man and a woman can again live together with each other, both naked and unashamed spiritually as well as physically – that’s worth striving for don’t you think?

But before we leave the garden behind, we need to learn of one more consequence that our original parent’s learned as a result of their sin.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ
have **clothed yourselves with Christ.**

Galatians 3:27

Scripture notes, that before expelling them from the garden, God clothed A&E with garments made from animal skin (Genesis 3:21). Meaning that in order to give them a very physical illustration that sin always leads to death, God killed a pair of innocent animals in front of them – thus establishing the law of **substitutionary atonement** – which could one day bring about spiritual restoration both for them and their progeny. Those animal deaths temporarily paid their penalty; they would thereafter wear the skins as a reminder that another’s death had covered their sin.

And this is still how Christ covers our sin. When we come to him in faith, we become spiritually clothed in Christ, his Holy Spirit now living with our spirit in our physical body, so that when God the Father looks at us, He no longer sees our sin but only his sinless son.

That’s something we should be eternally thankful for, don’t you think?