

Genesis 3

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[0 : 00] So I love the carols. I love the scripture readings like you do.! I love the tradition of them.

They are like deep springs of water, aren't they? That flow to the person and the birth of Jesus Christ. And they begin in Genesis chapter 3.

Where you've got the first hide and seek in the Bible. You've also got the first promise of the child of God. The men and women, they are hiding and God is seeking.

And I want to say you cannot understand yourself. You cannot understand the world. You cannot understand your feelings. Let alone the coming of Jesus, apart from this passage. So I've got two points. The first one is hiding.

And the second one is seeking. So first, who is hiding and why? Genesis 3 begins with one man and one woman in fig leaves.

[1 : 00] And we read, they heard the sound of the Lord. Literally, they heard the voice of the Lord God in the garden, in the cool of the day, in the spirit of the day.

And the man and his wife hid themselves. They hid themselves from the presence of the Lord amongst the trees of the garden. It's very strange, isn't it?

They are in fig leaves. I'm not talking about the Achenus. This is the first couple. And God has created them in a perfect world. And he's placed them in the garden.

And he's given them everything they needed. And he's bound them together. And some verses before, at the end of the second chapter, we read this. Can you see it with me?

Right at the end of the chapter, we read this. The man and his wife, they were naked. And they felt no shame. And that is a picture of complete openness and trust and transparency.

[2 : 03] And the fact they have no shame, it means that there's a unity between what is going on inside them and what is going on outside them.

There's a transparency of soul. There's an inner purity and honor. And that matches an external reality. And so it's saying to you, there's nothing to hide whatsoever on the outside or on the inside. And something drastic has happened, doesn't it, in those seven short verses. Everything has changed. And now they feel shame and they feel fear and they distrust each other.

And they're wearing fig leaves in a futile attempt to cover themselves and to change themselves and to heal themselves. But worse than that, they instinctively feel they need to hide from God.

The one who made them, the one who gave them to each other, and the one who gave them everything. And part of the genius of this narrative is it explains why we hide from God.

[3 : 06] And it explains to you where fear and shame come from. And what the consequences are of trying to play God. So, I mean, you know the story of the figure of Satan.

He is there, isn't he? He's seen in the shape of the serpent. And he suggests to Adam and Eve that God's word limits their freedom.

And God's word limits their creativity. And God's word limits their identity. And they would be much better, much better off, if they made their own moral choices.

And if they left behind what God said. And the only consequence of doing that, he says, is you will be free. And so they try to play God.

And the breach is inside them. And then with each other. And with creation. And with God.

[4 : 10] And the unity and the vulnerability that they had within themselves and between each other and with God is replaced by fear and hiding. Precisely because they try to replace God.

And the very sentence. Can you see it? That as soon as they disobey God. Their eyes are opened.

The eyes of both of them are opened. And they know that they are naked. And they sew fig leaves together. And they make themselves loin cloths. It's a change at the level of the soul.

Nothing has changed about their bodies at this point. But now they recoil from each other. They are insecure. They are anxious. They are guilty. They are ashamed. And it's a change on the inside of them.

And you see their alienation between their outer bodies and their inner selves. And that's the first thing that happens, isn't it? So all the fig leaves in all the world cannot heal the division.

[5 : 14] And the sense of anxiety. Because it's got a spiritual root. It's alienation from God. And so remember they thought that throwing off what God said would make them flourish.

And it would enable them to have whatever they wanted. And their perception is twisted. And they decide themselves.

And instantly, they feel that they're unprotected. Instantly, anxiety breaks in. Instantly, they are defenseless against each other. And they need fig leaves to hide.

And things only get worse when God comes into the garden. They hear the voice of the Lord born to them in the spirit of God. And at the end of the day, they suddenly recognize how ridiculous it is to try and hide from God in fig leaves.

So they develop a new strategy. Just like we've developed millions and millions of strategies. Now they hide quite brilliantly from God behind a tree.

[6 : 19] And it's only when they hear the voice of God. It's only when they understand the word of God that they realize the inadequacy of the fig leaves situation.

They've tried to find, they've tried to play God. They thought that their freedom would be found in leaving God to make their own rules and their own decisions.

And the voice of God comes and they hide. It's really interesting, isn't it? The voice of God comes and they hide. And we still do. Well, the voice of God comes and it calls to men and women for the first time in the Bible.

And for the first time in human experience, there is fear. Can you see what it says? It says, verse 9, The Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you?

And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself. He's truthful about what he's feeling.

[7 : 25] But he hides the real reason. And so when God asks him directly, Have you eaten from the tree? Question which God knows the answer to. Adam throws his wife under the bus.

And he plays the victim. And he turns his shame into blame. And he even blames God himself. Can you see that?

He says, doesn't he, in verse 12, The woman who you gave to be with me, She gave me the fruit of the tree and I had. That's our default strategy, isn't it?

To offload shame. That is, I think, the way that we try and hide from God And the truth about ourselves and about others. We play the victim.

And we can hear it in Adam, can't we? We can hear it in his voice. I didn't really want to do it. I'm a good person, God. I am a good person.

[8 : 25] If there's anyone to blame, God, it's really her. And actually, it's you. Because you were the one who gave her to me. You were the one who gave me the woman.

We'd never be in this mess, God, If you had not given me her in the first place. I'm only wearing these silly leaves because of her. It's a lie. And it's a cruel distortion.

That instead of taking responsibility and telling the truth, Adam plays the victim card. And he justifies himself. And he weaponizes the victim card by blaming her. And God asks Eve, is this true?

And she follows Adam's example, doesn't she? And she blames the snake. She shifts the blame away from herself to the snake. Thinking that it will exonerate her. It's not my fault.

And we hide from each other. And we hide from God. And we're afraid of his voice. And afraid of being exposed. And when there is a danger of our truth being told.

[9 : 30] Because God is approaching. We resort, don't we, to self-justification. To cover our fig leaves. By finding someone else to blame.

We even blasphemously may blame God. It's almost impossible to spot it in ourselves.

I see it in other people around me. But it's impossible, I think, in some ways, to spot it in ourselves. We've walked away from God. And we've tried to play God.

And we've tried to hide from ourselves. And hide from each other. And hide from God. And we cobble together these corrupt strategies of defense. And all along, we've not dealt with the underlying alienation from God that's the problem.

And this is now what it means to be human. We begin by hiding. And the more we hide, the more we end up lost.

[10:38] Lost from ourselves. Lost from each other. Tragically lost from God. And at the end of Eve's attempt to throw off the blame, you think, isn't it time for God to start again?

Isn't it time for humanity 2.0? Isn't it time for a new human? A new human who will cover our shame and take it away. Who will deal with what the snake and our sin have done and reconcile us to God. And so I turn from point 1, hiding, to point 2, seeking. Because the truly remarkable thing in this passage and in the garden is that God doesn't give up on humanity. Despite the fact that the man and the woman no longer desire God.

They no longer love him naturally. And they blame God for the mess. God comes and he seeks and he seeks and he seeks. And as they hide behind the tree in a useless fig leaves without any desire for God.

God comes and he calls them. And he knows that they are hiding. And yet he still calls. And this is how God comes to all of us. He comes by his word.

[11:56] And he asks them these really simple questions. I don't know whether you've spotted them. Where? What? Who?

And he wants them to take responsibility. He wants them to own up. He will not judge us before he knows all the facts.

And God does not hide from us. We hide from him. And some people think, don't they, that God is hard to find. And some people think that we need to go through all sorts of exercises to find God. God. But it's not us who are seeking God, is it? It's God who's seeking us. God pursues us. God seeks us. It's not Adam and Eve who seek after God. It's God who seeks after Adam and Eve. And they don't find God. It's God who comes to find them. They don't try and draw near to heal the breach between them.

[12:54] That's what God does. They don't come and ask him the questions. That's what God does. They take no initiative towards him. The initiative is all on God's side. Seeking, seeking, seeking. And he makes a way by coming to us.

And it shows the incredible high value, doesn't it? That God puts on men and women and boys and girls. Because his plan, as we'll see in a moment, it involves great personal cost.

And so here in the garden you get the first promise of a saviour. And it comes in that sentence that God passes on the serpent. God speaks of a new order in the universe. The world has changed, he says, because of what you've done.

For the man and the woman of their responsibility. And he limits the evil of Satan. And he passes sentence. And he promises that there will be a day when there will be an end to all evil.

Look at verse 15. He says, God says, I will put enmity, I will put war between you and the woman. The serpent and the woman. And between your offspring and her offspring.

[13:58] And he that is singular, he shall bruise your head. And you shall bruise his that is singular heel.

It's the first prophecy in the Bible. God is the first prophet in the Bible. And he promises the coming of a rescuer. The coming of Christ. The good news of the coming of Jesus is right here in the garden.

It's spoken by the creator himself. Adam and Eve overhear it. But he doesn't say it directly to them. Because while it is the answer to their need. There's something more important going on, isn't there?

God will reestablish his own rule. God will reestablish his godness. He now has to redeem all of creation from this evil.

So our individual redemption is part of a much, much greater work. And he promises there will be a conflict. And he promises the gift of a champion.

[15:02] And he says, I will deal with Satan and with death and with evil and with sin through one offspring of the woman. It's a special tenderness to her.

He, singular, will bruise your head, Satan. And you will bruise his heel. He says there's two humanities. And from those two humanities will come one offspring.

One particular boy child. And he will ultimately win the victory over Satan and the cost of his life. And this word, bruise, it's much stronger than we translate it.

It's a word for shatter or for break. God promises a child who will crush the cranium of the snake. Will crush the head of the snake.

There will be an utter defeat. And he will destroy Satan. And all his evil. And all his lies under his feet. But in so doing, the boy saviour will be fatally wounded.

[16:14] The very heel that he uses to stamp on Satan's head will be crushed. It's the same word. But through that death, God will gain the victory.

And so what that means is this. It means that salvation will come through judgment. That's a big theme throughout the Bible. Salvation will come through judgment.

See, if you have a gospel where somebody says, we never talk about judgment. It isn't actually the gospel. It's impossible. And so there will be salvation through judgment.

There will be judgment on Satan. And judgment on the offspring. And at the same time, a way for humanity to be saved.

And so that means that the root of the Bible, the trajectory of history, is towards victory. And so yes, there is suffering. And yes, there is judgment.

[17:10] But the even greater reality is salvation. And redemption through one of Eve's children. And from this point on in the Bible, everyone is looking for this child.

One who will come. So look at chapter 4 and verse 1. Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have produced a man, or the man, with the help of the Lord. Is this the guy? Is this the one that will crush Satan's head? It turns out, no, it does not. You come to Noah, and is Noah the one who will take the shame away?

No, he's the one who ends up adding to the shame. You go to Abraham, and you go to Moses, and you go to David, and none of them are able to take our guilt, and our distortion, and our blame, and our terrible evil.

And again and again, God renews his promise. And so in Isaiah, we hear God prophesy. He tells us about a man of sorrows who is coming. He's a man of sorrows for our transgression.

[18:19] He's crushed for our iniquities. And we all, like sheep, have gone astray and turned each one to his own ways, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And while all the world waits, and all of heaven waits, Mary has a boy child. And the angel says, you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

And the boy grows to be a man. And the man lives a life that is utterly blameless, and spotless, and generous, and transparent. The one person who has no need to be ashamed.

And he says in his ministry, do you remember, I have come to seek, and to save, the lost. To take our fear and our guilt, and our blame onto himself.

And onto the cross, he is separated, and alienated, alienated, from God, that we might be brought back. That we might be reconciled, and healed, and forgiven.

[19:33] And so that is why we meet this day. The truly, astonishingly, good news, that God has remembered his promise from the garden. That he has sent his son, as one of us, to bring us back to God.

And so I say to you, on this boxing day, don't hide from him. Don't hide from him. Hide in him.

Because as you hide yourself in him, as you trust in him, he will bring you back to God.

And he will bring you back, to yourself actually. Won't he? And he will bring you back to others as well. And the way that you hide yourself in him, is you, you clothe yourself in him.

You, you put him on. Because as long as you remain outside of him, in no relation to him, you are still lost.

But as you trust him, as you clothe yourself in him, as you put him on, as you recognize that it is only his robes of righteousness, that you can stand before God, you can be found.

[20:57] Let's pray. Thank you.