

Genesis 1-11

The Story of Our Broken World

Genesis 3:1-12

July 30, 2006

When I was about ten years old my dad, a medical doctor, received a special gift from one of his patients: a beautiful globe with shiny sequins that spun around on its base and played one of my dad's favorite songs. My dad proudly demonstrated how it worked: grab it by the base, slowly wind it counter-clockwise and then release it and let it spin clockwise and play the beautiful music. And then he told us, "You can touch it but don't wind it because you might break it." A week later, while my dad was at work, I found the globe and brought it to my room. And although I heard my dad say, "Don't wind it up," I decided to wind it up anyway. I just gave it a little twist and let it play; and it played, but only for five seconds. So I gave it another twist and another twist and five more twists and then – SNAP! The globe separated from the base. I tried desperately to put it back together again. I forced the two pieces together. I tried gluing it. I tried taping it. Finally, as I stared hopelessly at the two broken pieces of the globe, I realized that it was broken beyond repair. So I went into my closet, shut the door and hid.

You know where this is heading: it's Genesis 3 all over again. And I tell you this story because, although I believe that Adam and Eve were real people, they are also "mythical people" – in the sense that we don't just read Genesis 3 as a distant, hazy story because every day of our lives we are living in Genesis chapter 3.

It's a story that started with Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And after God completed His work of creation, He surveyed it all and pronounced it "very good." Throughout the first two chapters of Genesis we find pointers declaring over and over again: GOD IS GOOD – so good that it ought to make us like the kids in *Willy Wonka*, running through a candy heaven saying, "Oh, look at that. And look at this. And taste this. God is good!" Or as we pray when we gather for the Lord's Supper – "It is right and good and a joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty." Then in Genesis 2, God shapes Adam and gives him the breath of life and a garden with rivers and gold and fruit trees and animals and work to do and a beautiful naked counterpart named Eve which causes him to sing, "At last, she's bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

But we don't live in this world, do we? Our world is like the broken globe: it's been twisted too far and we can't put it back together again. Relationships break; our sexuality breaks (so we – i.e. men - can't look at naked women without lust); we're slowly breaking the earth; our hearts break; nations break down and go to war; our health breaks; our politics break. And whether you like Bob Dylan or not, he asks the right question: "How does it feel to be without a home like a complete unknown like a rolling stone?" It hurts and it aches. And all the glue and tape and happy, positive thinking can't put it back together again. So this morning I want to explore two questions: How did we get here? And, secondly, is there any hope for us?

Read verse 1. We learn a few things about the serpent in these verses: (1) God made the serpent. The serpent isn't God's equal but bad sparring partner. That's why when Jesus came he gave his followers authority over Satan. (2) But, secondly, the serpent is "crafty." He's good at what he does – i.e. the art of seduction. Which means (assuming you believe in a personal devil) the serpent is much smarter than you. In a game of wits with the devil, you'll go down every time. Notice that the devil isn't rude or nasty. He doesn't always make people's heads spin around and cause them to vomit and curse. Instead, more often the devil is suave, smooth, urbane and hip.

And here's where the craftiness comes in: "Did God *really* say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" Now before we go any further, since Eve and the serpent will share "perspectives" about what God has said, let's just read what God actually said – see Genesis 2:16-17. That's remarkably clear and it's also incredibly generous. God is good.

But notice what the serpent does: first, he begins to objectify God. In other words, the serpent and Eve have a little dorm-room theological bull session about God, but no one actually talks to God. And then, secondly, the serpent begins to sow seeds of mistrust with a simple question: *Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"* What kind of God is that? That's not a good God; that's a cosmic killjoy, a prude, a Nietzschean god of the spider. Do you see how this all begins to unravel with a simple, tiny question: Did God really say? That question is like twisting the globe called the cosmos. Is God good? Can God be trusted? Will God breathe life into me (i.e. see Genesis 2:7) or will God suck life out of me? Everything hangs on that one question – so the serpent begins to chip away at the rock of God's goodness.

It's the central question behind the story of Genesis and the story of your life: will I trust God or turn away from God? Trust is the foundation of every relationship. If you don't trust your spouse, it's hard to grow in your marriage. If you don't trust your parents, why would you want to obey them? For the Christian, this is the taproot of every disorder of the human soul: Can I trust God? Can I take God at His word? Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will not hunger" (John 6:35). Can I trust that or do I have to go looking for my own bread to satisfy my spiritual hunger? The Bible says, "Cast all your cares on the Lord because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Can I trust that or do I need to find another place to bring my cares and anxieties? The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Do I believe that or do I have to work harder to get my sins cleansed before a Holy God? (For other examples see Romans 8:28 or Matthew 6:33 or 2 Corinthians 9:7-8 or Philippians 4:6-7 or Psalm 46:1).

For most of us, it's not always an easy question. We have doubts. We've been told, "You have to rely on yourself. People won't be there for you. You are alone. Look, no one will do it for you. Trust leads to betrayal, so keep your heart closed. Shut your heart. Numb your heart." Some of this comes from deep wounds – abuse, abandonment, rejection, betrayal, disappointment. These act like arrows to pierce our heart with sorrow and hurt and fear. So we numb our hearts and don't trust.

And then on top of that, God seems to act in ways that we don't understand. We want God to fix our problems and make our lives smooth, but then God says things like, "Count it all joy when you encounter various trials" (James 1:2-4). Huh? What did you say, God? You want to give me trials and then you want me to count it all joy? Look, let's be honest: doubt is part of the spiritual journey. But will the doubt drive us towards God and His goodness – sometimes arguing, lamenting, crying out to God – or will it drive us away from God?

Is God good or not? Will I trust God or will I believe the biggest lie in the universe: *You are alone. You must make it on your own. You must grab the fruit for yourself.* Is God good? It is THE question that has haunted me most of my life. When I was 14 years old I concluded that God wasn't good. Actually, I thought that God was out to get me and then make my life miserable. I remember on one occasion when I was playing basketball and the ball rolled underneath my parents' car and jammed against the muffler. I pulled and pushed on the ball, but I could not loosen it. After about twenty minutes, as my frustration and anger level escalated, I finally raised my eyes towards heaven and let loose a violent streak of curses against God. I told God I hated him. I told God I wanted Him to leave me alone. I told God some really bad things that I can't repeat in church. (Yea, if you think I'm messed up now, you should have seen me before Christ wrestled me to the ground). You see, I was firmly convinced that God was the kind of God who would intentionally wedge my basketball under a car muffler just to make me frustrated and miserable. I could fear that God but I could never trust that God.

Eve is like most of us: she trusts God – sort of. Certainly, she's seen God's goodness all around her. The world is full of evidence of God's goodness, but she's also starting to distort the truth of God's goodness. So she begins with, "We may eat from the fruit from the trees in the garden..." Actually, God said, "You are *free* to eat from *any* tree in the Garden." *Free* and *any* are the key words. The emphasis is not on the restrictions but on the freedom. You were made for freedom. And then she misses the point again in verse 3 by adding one small detail: "and you must not touch it"? God never said that. Again, it distorts the goodness of God.

So the serpent keeps chipping away at the rock of God's goodness, whispering into Eve's ear, "Did God really say that? What kind of God is that? You can't trust that God. You have to look out for yourself. You have to grab that fruit, baby, because no one will do it for you. But look at it hanging there: it's yours for the taking." Remember we said last week that the "tree of good and evil" stood for a specific, profound symbol: the right to determine good and evil; the right to say that I or we form the standards for right and wrong; the right to exchange roles with God, dethroning God and taking his place. So the serpent whispers, "You can do that. You'll never get what you want in life unless you look out for yourself."

Finally, all of this starts to make sense to Eve so she buys the lie: I am on my own; I can't trust God – not really; I have to look out for myself; I can exchange roles with God. And

from that point on notice the rapid succession of verbs: She saw, She took, She ate, She gave, and he ate. Everything starts to unravel.

Now here's the truth: sin looks good. Taking from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, deciding for ourselves right from wrong, looks like a great option. But there is a price to pay here: See verse 7. The serpent said, "Your eyes will be opened." And their eyes were opened, but it wasn't what they bargained for: their eyes were opened to their own nakedness. "Oops, Eve did you know we're actually naked?" And with the nakedness comes shame. Shame is the feeling that we haven't measured up, that we're defective and inadequate. So they do two things: (1) they try to make fig leaves in a pathetic attempt to cover their butts and (2) they run away and hide from God.

How did this happen? Whose fault is all of this? The amazing thing is that no one takes responsibility for any of this? Everyone evades and excuses and blames. First, look at Adam. By the way, where is Adam in this story? Is he wandering around the garden somewhere totally oblivious to this scene? Probably not. All of the pronouns in verses 2-5 are in the plural and then after Eve ate the fruit Adam seemed to be right there. Now let me ask this: what is Adam doing? Here's what he's doing: he's watching his wife have a friendly bull session with Satan and he just keeps his mouth shut and watches. He's a 90's guy. He's nice and sensitive. He never interrupts his wife and says, "Honey, I really don't think we should be talking to the devil." Nor does he say, "Ah, Eve, I don't mean to correct, but actually that's not quite what God said." Human history is going down the cosmic toilet and Adam stands to the side and (whistling) looks the other way.

Why didn't he do something or say something. In verse 10 Adam himself tells us the motivating force behind this scene: "I was afraid because I was naked." That's it, guys. That's why we hide: we're afraid. Fear dominates us, controls us, and makes us run and hide. We're afraid of conflict; we're afraid of people; we're afraid of getting it wrong. And we're afraid because we're naked and ashamed. Shame says, "You don't have what it takes. You'll get in the battle and you'll lose it. You'll be caught with your trousers down – literally. You will fail or you *might* fail so stick with stuff you know you're good at – work, watching ESPN, playing golf, making music, having sex. Just stick with the safe stuff." Do you see how fear drove Adam?

If we unravel Adam's bad example, guys, we find out what we're supposed to do. In terms of Genesis 3 we're supposed to stand between the serpent and our family. We lay our life in the middle of our family and demonic deception. How do you do that? First and foremost, we become a man of prayer. We become a man who cries out to God from the depths of our weakness and brokenness and confusion and father-wounds and say, "Abba, Father, help me! My family is under attack and I need you. I'm standing here today between the serpent and my family and a great battle is raging – or it will be raging and you've called me to stand up and speak. But I'm afraid. No, I'm terrified and I want to run away. I have no idea how to stand or what to say, so, Father, teach me. Help me. Guide me. Pour your strength and power into this weak vessel." And then we arise and go forth as a man – a broken, wounded, sinful man – who has nevertheless been touched, filled, inflamed and empowered with the presence of Jesus Himself. And, believe me,

you will make mistakes – lots of them. But you won't be an Adam, looking the other way.

What does Adam do instead? Read verses 11-13. He blames and excuses himself. Whose fault is it? God's. Whose fault is it? That woman. The world is going down the cosmic toilet, the globe is getting twisted off its foundations, he watches it happen and even willingly participates in it and all he can say is, "Well, God, it's the woman that you gave me." He doesn't own any of it. He just gets defensive.

Eve isn't much better. God turns to her and she says, "The serpent deceived me." "I'm just a poor little damsel in distress and the big bad serpent tricked me – and my worthless husband just checked out once again because I can never rely on him to be the spiritual leader of our home and he never listens to me or romances me like all those cool guys on the chick flicks." Technically, that's all partially true, but the serpent deceived her because (1) she was already distorting the truth, (2) she invited the devil in for a nice chat and Bible study and (3) she wanted the forbidden fruit anyway. She's like all of us: Eve is surrounded by beauty and goodness and God's provision, but the one thing she really wants – that tree right in the middle of the garden – is denied her. That one thing that we really need – a date, a husband who really listens to me like my girlfriends or Dr. Phil, parents who love me and act cool, that dream home, a sexual fling with that air-brushed woman, the perfect body, straight A's – that one thing I really want, God denies me. So Eve wants what she wants and she's going to get it - with or without her checked-out husband.

Neither one of them take responsibility. Both of them are locked into blame and excuses and defensiveness. It's her fault! No, it's his fault! In marriage counseling this is called a "cycle of negativity" and once this cycle gets revved up, no one wants to admit responsibility. *It's not my fault! For goodness sakes, I'm the victim here. If you could just hear my side of the story, you'd see how right and justified I am.*

This is the beginning of the world's brokenness. It's a mess, isn't it? In the midst of God's good creation, there is a pattern that looks like this:

- ❖ It begins with seeds of mistrust towards God and a distortion of God's character so that the God who is for us is now the God who is against us → which leads to an acceptance of the cosmic lie: you are on your own → we see desire gone awry – we want what we want; it looks good so we go for it → we find a man who checks out and a woman who acts like a victim → and no one takes responsibility but instead they both slip into blame, evasion and denial → we see a anxious and hurried flight from God → the breakdown of a marriage, the fracture of a friendship and a community → the beginning of shame and the need to cover up our shame (instead of fig leaves we use things like jobs, cars, clothes, degrees, awards, religion and religious activities, morality – all in an attempt to prove that we are not naked and defective).

Do you see what I mean when I say that this is our story too? The New Testament has a name for this whole scenario: it's called the "law of sin and death" (see Romans 8:1-4).

It's a law just like gravity is a law, and like gravity, it always pulls us down. So is there any hope for us? Can we unravel this mess? After all, we are a long, long way from the Garden. How can we get back to the Garden? Our mistrust has grown deeper. Our shame and blame has become more intense. So is there any hope for us?

And the Bible says: Yes! It's called the Gospel. Actually, the New Testament declares says that another "law" has entered the cosmos: it's called the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Read Romans 8:1-2. Did you hear that amazing good news? There is another law available to you – and it's a law that leads to freedom. The Gospel is the story – God's story – of how God won our freedom back through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. You see, Jesus died not just as a nice guy who knew we needed a little help and a new religion. He died because we were locked into a hopeless downward spiral called the law of sin and death that started in the Garden and that's been repeated for millions of years. Christ died for us because we were trapped in sin, shackled by the law of sin and death. Christ came as a warrior – better than Superman or Spiderman or Jack Bauer or William Wallace – to fight for our freedom, to set us free from the law of sin and death. And when he lived and died and rose again so you can call out to Him, "Lord, Jesus, I truly believe that you are the One who can set me free from the law of sin and death, so I trust in you," he truly sets us free. What does that mean? As one great Christian writer said, it means that we can "walk Adam's dance backwards."

- It means that I can trust God because God is for me and not against me.
- It means that God's heart towards me is always good and kind and compassion and I can rest in His father heart of goodness towards me.
- It means that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of sin and death is still there, but it isn't the truest thing about you.
- It means that I can be content with what I have – I don't need to always crave more.
- It means that I don't need to check-out and I don't need to act like a victim.
- It means that I don't need to evade responsibility or blame others. I can stand before God and others and say, "Look, the law of sin and death has a grip on me. It drags me down. I need help. And if I hurt you, please forgive me. Would you pray for me?" We confess our sins to one another.
- It means that I don't have to hide behind my shame. I don't have to create fig leaves to cover my shame and my nakedness because the Bible tells me that I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ himself.
- It means that I can give myself away to others in love and service, ministering to the poor and lost because God will take care of me.

You see, when you come to Christ and place your faith in Him there is a miraculous renewal of your person. You're no longer just in the grip of the law of sin and death. Christ has set you free. Live your freedom. Celebrate your freedom. Worship the One who has set you free. And then share that freedom. Be a signpost of God's mercy, the hope of Jesus, in the midst of this broken world.