

Genesis 1-11

Longing for Eden

Chapter 3:14-23

October 22, 2006

Many of you know all about the “curse of the Bambino.” For 86 years God or fate had placed a curse on the Boston Red Sox baseball team because they traded Babe Ruth (the Bambino) to the New York Yankees. For 86 agonizing years that curse remained until it was broken in 2004 when the Red Sox beat the Yankees in seven games and then won the World Series. We know about curses. A curse is bad news. Blessing has the power to do good; cursing has the power to exclude us, judge us and keep us under it’s grip and control.

Genesis 3 tells us about another curse – a curse with a penalty and effects. Remember the story of the Bible up to this point: we were made in the image and likeness of a good and glorious God. As male and female, we were made to reign as dignified and whole image-bearers. But now Adam and Eve – the representatives for all of us – have rebelled against God’s good reign. As we walk through this passage in the Bible, remember we are still God’s glorious image bearers. But when we defied God and rebelled against God, the blessings of God started to unravel. The good world is broken and shattered and we live “east of Eden.”

The Nature of the Curse – Satan. Notice the nature of the curse in Genesis 3. First, only the serpent gets cursed directly. First, in verse 14 we read the first part of the judgment: “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.” This isn’t a folktale but it is symbolic description of the presence of Satanic evil. It doesn’t mean that Satan looks like a snake or that he once had legs. It means that he’s now cursed by God and destined to “eat dust.” We talk the same way sometimes – “eat my dust.” The Bible uses the same phrase to describe defeat and utter humiliation (Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 49:23). The key thing to note here is that Satan’s defeat - as well as every form of evil – has been sealed. He will eat dust.

Living East of Eden for the man and the woman. Now let’s look at what the penalty and effects of the curse on the first man and the first woman – and by the way, the same penalty and effects come down to us today. Now you might be thinking: why do the stupid actions of Adam and Eve – whoever they were – come down to me? God designed the world as a moral world and as a moral world there are consequences to our actions. Sin has a price tag. If a two-year old ignores her parents and sticks her finger in a light socket anyway, she will get shocked. If 17 years old have sex enough times, they will get pregnant or have an abortion – either way, someone will pay the consequences for it. If I get angry and gossip or calmly degrade you my words, I will wound your spirit. But these consequences are not just individualistic – they are corporate, communal and even cosmic. Perhaps they best way to illustrate sin is to imagine a corporation that

dumps toxic chemicals in the river. Just by the laws of gravity, the chemicals will float downstream, killing fish and plants and poisoning human beings.

Sin works the same way. Sin has a price tag. Sin pollutes our world. It really is like dumping toxic chemicals upstream and watching it float downstream. Our first parents dumped poison in the stream. The generations in your family dumped toxic garbage into the river of your life. I dump toxins into the river of life as well. We're all part of the mess of sin.

And all of this begins in verses 16-19. Notice the big picture: the man and the woman were created by God to be glorious image bearers of God. We were meant to live with a vertical outlook and posture – standing straight up, looking to God, getting our bearings and fulfillment from knowing God and being with God. Now as we work through this passage we'll see that our sin has bent us. Rather than living vertically, standing straight and looking to God and being with God, from now on men and women are bent towards something else. In this passage, generally speaking, the woman is bent towards relationships. And generally speaking, the man is bent towards his work, towards productivity and efficiency and success. This does not mean that women don't want to work or be successful or that men don't care about relationships. Not at all! It just means that our primary bent away from God is in different directions – women towards relationships and men towards things and activities.

Longing for Redemption – the effects of the curse on the woman. Now let's dive into the nitty-gritty stuff in this passage. Notice the effects of the curse for the woman. See verse 16. First, God says, "I will greatly increase your pains in childrearing; with pain you will give birth to children." From now on joy and delight will be intermingled with pain and sorrow. Genesis 1:28 told us that "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" In other words, have babies, have lots and lots of babies. Have fun. Children are a delight and a gift from God. But now notice that this great gift, this wonderful blessing is mingled with pain. And the pain mentioned here is probably not the act of childbirth – it's life with children. It's the pain of watching your daughter board the bus and go to kindergarten. It's the pain of waiting for a teenager to come home after your curfew. It's the pain of watching a son or daughter with an eating disorder or a problem with cutting. It's the pain of giving your son away in marriage. It's the pain of saying that you want to be a perfect parent, to protect your children from harm, but you can't. It's the pain of living east of Eden. It's the pain we experience when the world is not our home. Don't men and fathers experience this pain? Of course they do, but generally speaking, this will strike deeper into the woman's heart. She feels the pain of broken relationships more than the man.

Secondly, this story tells us, "Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you." Now keep in mind that this is part of living in a cursed world, a fallen and broken world. This is not God's original design. In Genesis 2:18 when the woman was first created, God called the woman the helper for the man. The Hebrew word for helper did not imply subservience or inferiority. Not at all! It was actually a military term for a savior or a rescuer. Guys, you know this is true. Think for just a moment about all the

stupid things you've done because you did not listen to your wife. (Don't think about it too long because we can't be here all week). Think of all the stupid things she saved you from when you did listen to her. And, guys, if you're drawing a blank, you're either a holy man or you're really dense. Think of all the stupid things organizations – and churches – do because they do not seriously listen to women. Men and women were supposed to be a team – that doesn't mean they perform the same function; it does mean that they strive together for the same goal. You can say whatever you want about gender roles, but if you don't get that down, you're out of step with God's original plan.

That's the original blessing of God – men and women as a team. But now after the Fall, that gets broken and distorted. “Your *desire* will be for your husband.” The same word for desire is used in Genesis 4:7 where God tells Cain that sin desires to have you – it's a strong word that means to control, manipulate and draw you into itself. It means that generally speaking the woman, rather than looking to God for her significance, will bend towards her husband in an attempt to find significance and happiness in him. There's something missing inside her heart so she will look to him for more emotional connection, romantic attentiveness, more security, more fulfillment than he can give. She desires so how does she get it? She manipulates and controls him. She can't just let him be. She has to change him, to make him into a project. Of course this can be quite frustrating because as Jerry Seinfeld says, “Women keep saying, “No, my man is different; he's coming along. No, he isn't. Men as a gender are not improving.” Our alienation from God means that no marriage partner will ultimately fulfill us. Man and woman, who were designed to be one flesh, are now tearing each other apart.

The rest of verse 16 says, “Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you.” That's a straight forward description of male dominance – the good old boys club that will keep women as second class members of the human race. Notice that this is a result of the fall not creation, the curse not the blessing. There are blatant examples of men ruling over women - wife battering, sexual abuse and rape. Men (and women), if you don't think these are serious problems, we have to get our heads out of the sand. It's all around us. For the past twenty years, I've spent hundreds of hours listening to women who have been sexually abused by fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, neighbors, pastors and strangers. Men can rule over women by simply ignoring this or minimizing this pain. It breaks the heart of God. Jesus was a fierce defender of a woman's heart. But there are also more subtle ways that men rule over women – minimizing a woman's opinions, denigrating women as “too emotional” and therefore inferior to the rationality and analytical powers of men. I've sat at dinner tables with Christian leaders who talk about grand themes of winning the world for Christ or winning this battle for God or tackling this project, but the women never get a word in. It's all part of life east of Eden.

Longing for Redemption – the effects of the curse on the man. Now we get to the man in verses 17b-19. Generally speaking, rather than standing before God as a man, as a new man in Christ, drawing life and security from the Father, the man will draw his satisfaction and fulfillment from his work or success. To me this seems a little more straightforward. “Cursed is the ground.” The very basis of work is blessed and cursed at the same time. Many of us like or even love our jobs, but they're also one of the biggest

sources of frustration. Work is hard – “through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” Long hours, tension headaches, carpal tunnel, high blood pressure, black lung disease, achy joints, sleepless nights – work is hard. As we shape and toil our work, our work can also fight back – “It will produce thorns and thistles for you.” “Thorns and thistles” refer to anything or anyone in our jobs that don’t go according to plan. They are the things that bite back. We achieve our sales numbers and then we have to go out and do it again. The grant runs out so we have to get another one. We get our ducks in a row and some bozo comes along and moves the ducks. More stress. More work. More sweat. Until eventually, man who was taken from the ground by God will eventually return back to the ground.

But for some reason this doesn’t stop most of us as men (and of course many women too) from still looking to our work for meaning and validation. We turn to our work and say, “Tell me who I am. Fulfill me. Satisfy my heart. Make me feel important and manly.” Generally speaking, the man is bent towards his work, demanding that his work fill the empty space in his heart. (Story – the lie “I am what I do.”).

Our deep brokenness and a hint of redemption.. Of course all of this leads to an even bigger story of brokenness and alienation. Read with me verse 24. We are not at home anymore. This is a staggering and sad picture of our sin-based separation from God. Every detail of this verse – the flaming swords (actually their more like a zigzagging sword), the powerful cherubim (mighty and fierce angelic beings that stand in God’s presence), the blocked path to Eden – suggest the expulsion of sinful humanity. We’re now like little kids looking in the window of the candy store. We long for satisfaction. We drool in hunger. We crave the chocolate bars, the chewing gum and the suckers, but the doors are closed and, besides, we’re too dirty anyway. No one would want us in there – everything is so shiny and clean and pure. A guard stands watch to keep us out. We ache for someone to invite us in, but no one is on our side. No one pleads our case.

That’s where Genesis 3 ends. Now you may ask, “Where’s the happy ending? Isn’t there any good news?” Ah, yes, there is a hint. Look with me at Genesis 3:15. It points to a clue, a hint of our redemption. God is addressing the serpent and he says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman.” The verb suggests that as long as we live on this planet we’re in a battle, a battle for our souls, a battle for the cosmos. There is enmity. There is not such thing as a “nice little life.” We will struggle in our relationships. We will struggle with our jobs. We will struggle with our approaching death. But worst of all, we will struggle with our separation from God. You’re in the mess and I’m in the mess.

But, look at the rest of the verse: “and between your offspring (or seed) and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Apparently, from the seed or offspring of the woman, someone will come who will crush the head of Satan. Satan will strike his heel, doing some damage, but ultimately, the very presence of evil will get crushed – and not just anywhere. This offspring of the woman will crush Satan right on the head. Why doesn’t Genesis 3:15 just come out and tell us who it is? Ah, that would ruin the good story. Like any great writer, God drops a clue. This is only page 3 in our Bible. Let’s

not give away too much. For now all we know is that Someone born out of the human race, birthed from the mess and agony of our human condition, will come as a seed of the woman to crush the head of Satan. But while he's doing it, he will get wounded by the bite of Satan. Of course we're reading this backwards with the entire Bible wide open. Who is this seed? It's Jesus.

What happens when the Gospel breaks into our world. The New Testament puts it this way – Jesus said, “I have come to seek and save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). What is lost? We are – every one of us. He came to seek us out. Later on, the Apostle Paul would reflect on the life of Christ and say, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:12). Now that's a little different context but notice the claim: Jesus became a curse for us. Jesus took our curse upon himself. Do you remember my (very imperfect and incomplete) analogy about sin being like dumping toxic chemicals in the river? That dumping has been going on for millions of years. It's in our rivers; it's in our families; it's in our communities; it's in our genes. That toxic waste represents not only our sin but also God's righteous judgment on our sin. But when Jesus came and lived for us, and then when he died for us, it was as if Jesus stood right in those smelly, turgid waters – the toxic waste from your sin and my sin, he sin of the entire human race and toxicity of God's judgment on our sin – he stood in those waters as no one has ever done or ever could do (because he was God), and then he opened his mouth wide and swallowed the entire, putrid, poisonous, toxic mess. He swallowed it all until it killed him. Now wherever he stands in the river, there is toxicity on one side and a pure, crystal clear stream on the other side. He swallowed it all. It's gone. So when you come to him, when you stand in him and beside him and behind him, you are no longer in the toxic mess. You are free. You are clean.

That's the Gospel. That's what he saves us from and into. It's incredibly good news. Let me tell you how it changes us.

1. It changes our relationship with God. Do you remember Genesis 3:24? I said we're like the children looking into the dandy store but we're messy and excluded. That's the picture of Genesis 3:24. We live east of Eden and we can't find our way back home. Jesus, the offspring of the woman, the Liberator, comes out to invite us back in. Now he declares, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28-30). We're dirty and smelly and hungry and drooling for something good and Jesus comes out to take us under his arm and bring us inside – right into the Father's house of delight. Come in. Come in. Come in. Never wait.
2. It changes our relationship to others. Talk about marriage and men vs. women. Talk about Christian community. I'm living with the effects of the curse; you're living with the effects of the curse. But there is no condemnation. So we might disagree and argue but we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. It changes our relationship with those who don't know Christ. There is a way back to the garden. Someone has come to bring us back to the Father. How could we not want to tell others? The worst thing in the world would be to say, “Well, I'm inside. I'm comfortable.” You see, as followers of this seed of Eve, this

Redeemer born from our race, we are involved in the greatest mission in the world – we get to work with God, to join with Jesus in the power of the Spirit, to be actively involved in reversing the effects of the curse.

Do you know the power of the Gospel? Do you know that there is a way back to the Garden? The penalty of our sin and the curse can be dealt with right now - immediately and conclusively. The effects of the curse can start to get reversed in your life today. Does that sound too good to be true? But God promised it not me. Your life can begin all over again when you come to Christ. Does it still delight you and amaze you and move you to tears? Or has your heart grown hard and cold? Are you distracted by other things? When you're with other followers of Jesus, does this fill and delight you?