

The Defeat of the Serpent

In this study, we begin a series of Advent lessons, based on the Scripture texts used in the traditional Nine Lessons and Carols Service (which we will observe on the morning of December 23). This first text gives us a wonderfully comprehensive background to the Christmas story, explaining in a vivid way why we need God to come to earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

Genesis 3:8-15

⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

What we learn here are two fundamental realities that inform our lives: 1) sin has ruined us, and 2) grace has restored us.

1. Sin ruins us (vv. 8-15a)

In the previous seven verses, Moses has just explained that Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, contrary to God's explicit instructions to them. This brought dire consequences:

A. Sin corrupts us (vv. 8-13)

Sin corrupts us so that we are ashamed of even being in the presence of God. Notice, first of all, that Adam tries to hide from God out of shame. He doesn't get very far. Neither do we. How silly even to try. (Cf. Ps 139:7-12). We always make ourselves and others miserable when we try to flee from Him. (Cf. Jonah 1; Luke 15:11-19) We have many ways of pretending, hiding, and managing our outward appearance—all because we are ashamed.

Secondly, sin corrupts by leading us to blame others. Adam blames Eve (v. 12), and Eve blames the devil (v. 13). But notice that Adam actually also blames God! ("The woman whom you gave...") We tend to do the same thing. Whenever we are in dispute or accused of something, we naturally seek to shift the blame to another. Shame and blame: we come by them honestly.

B. Sin condemns us (vv. 14,15a)

In verses 14-19, God now turns to His sentient creatures and pronounces judgment on them. Beyond our text, we see that for Eve and her daughters, childbirth will be a great burden (v. 16) and marriage will have conflict; for Adam and his generation, tilling and managing the creation will now only come through the sweat of hard labor (vv. 17-19a); and for all humanity, our bodies

shall, sooner rather than later, return to the dust of the ground (v. 19b). This condemnation begins with Satan in (vv. 14-15) including enmity between Satan and his seed and Eve and her seed. We see this vicious enmity Genesis 3 through Revelation 20.

Sin has indeed ruined us through corruption and condemnation, and there is nothing we can do on our own to remedy this tragedy.

2. Grace restores us (v. 15b)

In Genesis 3-11, the human story continues to deteriorate: Cain kills Abel, the flood destroys a whole generation of wickedness, and the Tower of Babel is society's attempt to be like God. There is only one thing more stubborn than sin: the grace of God! Amidst all of our degrading corruptions and our devastating condemnation, God issues promise after promise. In the very declaration of His curse upon the cosmos, God gives an extraordinarily gracious promise of salvation to us.

A. Grace forgives

God says that the heel of the seed of the woman will be bruised. We know this “seed” to be none other than Jesus Christ, and when He was bruised on Calvary, our condemnation was completely taken away. Likewise, our corruption will eventually be removed from us.

B. Grace triumphs

God also says that the head of the serpent will be bruised. Here we are promised that we shall one day be delivered completely from the destructive presence and influence of Satan. When Jesus died on Calvary's cross He put these principalities and powers up to public shame (Col. 2:14,15; Heb. 2:14,15), and will one day crush them under our feet! (Rom. 16:20)

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important that we understand the consequences of sin? Why is this topic often avoided?
2. What are the most common ways in which we try to hide from God? Why do we do this? What problems do these behaviors cause?
3. Why do we so quickly blame others for our problems? Why does this eventually lead to Adam's conclusion that the Lord Himself had sinned? How do you keep yourself from participating in this behavior?
4. Why does God condemn sin? Why can He not simply “dismiss the charges” against us?

5. Why must the heel of the woman's seed be bruised?

6. If the head of the serpent is bruised, why are we having such a hard time dealing with him right now?

7. Why do you think God gave Adam and Eve these promises at this particular moment in their lives?

Going Deeper

1. How have you been “hiding” from God? How do you need to pursue Him more radically and aggressively?

2. How can you more effectively appropriate the work of the Messiah in your life?