

The First Good News

Scripture Text: Genesis 3:1-15

Introduction

Advent is a time for celebrating the first coming of Jesus Christ as well as His second coming. There are different traditions of Advent. For us, the candles represent Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. All of these signify what the birth of Jesus Christ means for us: the hope we have in Christ; the peace Jesus brings to the world; the joy of salvation and being reconciled to God; the love God demonstrates to us in providing salvation through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Advent is a time for us to remember the first coming of Christ, the baby Jesus, the birth of mankind's Savior, but it is also a time to remember and prepare ourselves for His second coming – a time when He comes to get His bride, the church.

One thing I think we should realize about the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is that it did not begin two thousand years ago in a manger in Bethlehem. I know with the Christmas season upon us, we typically focus on the baby Jesus, Joseph and Mary, the wise men and the shepherds. We celebrate the birth of our Savior. Christmas is a time to remember the great gift God gave to mankind – His only begotten Son. The truth is that God's plan of salvation for mankind began long, long before the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. Most, if not all of us, are familiar with the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus' birth. We know God planned for the birth of Jesus long before He was born. But did you know that we can find God's plan of salvation even as far back as the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible? That's true. God planned the salvation of mankind as far back as the Garden of Eden, and revealed that to His people then. That should be comforting to us all. Old Testament prophecies as far back as Genesis point to Jesus Christ.

Everything was Very Good

The very first book of the Bible tells us about the creation of everything. In the beginning, before there was anything made, God created the heavens and the earth. God created the sun, the earth, and the moon. He created all the plants and animals. And finally, on the sixth day of creation, God created man. God created a creature in His own image, and all of this was very good. Right? Wrong! Have you noticed that there was one thing in what God created that was not very good? All of creation was very good, except that man was alone. All of the animals had mates, but there was not a mate for the man. God said that this was not good. Men, have you ever thought why God would say, "It is not good that man should be alone?" Well, God fixed that situation. God resolved the issue that was not good. He created a woman to be man's mate, his helper. And God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to take care of His creation. They were to have dominion over all creation, all other creatures. God promised them life and a relationship with Him. He only required that they obey Him and not eat of one tree in the garden. So at the end of Genesis chapter two, all was very good in paradise. But that didn't last long!

Trouble in Paradise

We do not know how much time it took to mess up creation. In Genesis chapters one and two, everything was very good. But, in Genesis chapter three, there was trouble in paradise. All was great until one day a crafty serpent entered the Garden. I believe most people dislike these creatures. I say most, because some like them and have them as pets. But others, like my mother for example, hates snakes. She has a garden hoe ready for the snake that slithers onto her yard. I once worked with someone who held a similar disdain for serpents, and claimed the Bible affirmed her hatred of these animals. She said the serpent and women would be enemies, and she fulfilled that promise. She was an enemy of any snake.

Well, I do not particularly like snakes either, but I don't think they are the enemy of mankind. The serpent in Genesis chapter three appears to be another type of enemy of mankind. In fact, Scripture elsewhere calls this serpent the Adversary. He is also called the deceiver of the whole world. In the last book of the Bible, John wrote the following:

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

This crafty creature in the Garden was none other than Satan himself. Satan entered paradise for the purpose of destroying what God had made very good. He went to Eve and asked her this question, “Did God say, ‘you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” This question may sound quite innocent, although it deliberately misquotes God. Satan’s question presumed that God had said Adam and Eve must not eat of any tree in the garden. What God had actually told Adam was this, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.” He didn’t say they shall not eat from any tree, just not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This should have clued Eve in on the nature of this crafty serpent. He was up to no good.

Notice, the means by which Satan deceived Eve. He distorted God’s Word and claimed that God was a liar. We need to pay careful attention to this! The means of deception and sin was to doubt God’s Word. Sin slithered into creation as a result of doubting God’s Word and disobeying Him. When we doubt God and His Word, sin is just around the corner. That is how Satan deceives us: casting doubt on what God has said. Did God really say lust is a sin? Does God really expect you to remain faithful to your wife? Did He really say you should be a cheerful giver? Does God really want you to forgive that person who hurt you? That’s how the enemy works. And so it was with Adam and Eve. Eve corrected Satan by saying they could eat from any of the trees in the Garden except one. But notice, Eve added to God’s original prohibition. She told Satan that they were not to even touch it. That was probably a good idea – stay as far away from temptation as you can. But God did not say to not touch the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God just said not to eat it. Again, this is a distortion of God’s Word. This may indicate that Eve thought she could reinterpret God’s Word or could modify His instructions.

Satan not only contradicted what God said but went on to present the forbidden fruit as something worth obtaining. Satan told Eve that by eating what God had forbidden, both Adam and Eve would be like God, knowing good and evil. The irony of this remark should not be overlooked. Adam and Eve, unlike the serpent, had been made in the image of God. In this way they were already like God. Moreover, God had given them dominion over creation. They were expected to exercise authority over all the beasts of the field, including the serpent. By obeying the serpent, however, Adam and Eve betrayed the trust God had placed in them. They rebelled against their divine King and obeyed one of His creatures. Eve disobeyed, but was not content to do it alone. Misery loves company. Adam was there with her, she gave some to him, and he ate. And so, both Adam and Eve disobeyed God, obeyed Satan instead, and brought sin upon mankind. There was trouble in Paradise.

The Blame Game

So, when you get into trouble, how do you respond? For some of us, we accept responsibility and say, "Yes, I did it." Others, have a little more trouble accepting responsibility. They like to play the blame game. They say, "It's not my fault. That person did it." Well, we learned that behavior early on. Children know it well. Satan entered the Garden, distorted God's Word and tempted Eve to disobey God. Eve ate the forbidden fruit and then gave some to her husband. The result was their eyes were opened, they saw that they were naked and hid from the presence of God. Sin breaks the fellowship we have with God. We choose to hide from God. God came along walking in the cool of the day, presumably to spend time with Adam and Eve. He called to Adam, "Where are you?" Adam responded to God saying he was afraid because he was naked and hid himself.

God asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" Adam did not answer God's questions but rather passed the blame on to his wife. Adam responded to God, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Like a child who was caught with his hands in the cookie jar, Adam said, "Uh huh! It wasn't me. Eve did it." Notice how sin affects us. When God calls us out on what we have done, we want to shift the blame onto someone else. Or sometimes we want to say, "Well, at least I am not as bad as that person." All of this is a failure to accept responsibility. Notice also that Adam seems to implicate God by saying, "The woman *You* gave to be with me." Adam not only refused to take responsibility and blamed Eve, he seemed to also blame God. God, you made her and look what she did.

Well, God asked Eve, "What is this that you have done?" Adam had blamed her for this trouble. Not to be outdone by Adam for throwing her under the bus, Eve also shifted the blame. She said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." You see, men, our wives do learn from us. Eve learned from Adam how to respond to trouble. Blame someone else. Nobody wanted to take responsibility. It is true that Satan had deceived Eve and tempted her to disobey God. But she took the fruit and ate it. She was responsible for her actions. And the serpent, well, he didn't have a leg to stand on. So, God pronounced judgement, starting with Satan. He cursed Satan and expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden. There was trouble in Paradise. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God and as a result He punished them. But, God has good news.

The Gospel is Announced

God's first response to man's rebellion showed more of God's love than God's wrath and God's justice. Adam and Eve were cut off from the source of life. They are in the realm of the dead. What they experience outside of Eden was not life as God intended, but spiritual death. Adam and Eve did not die that day, but they were spiritually dead, separated from the source of all life, God. But God was not willing to abandon His creation. God desired to save it. And so began God's plan for redeeming fallen mankind and restoring the broken relationship. Notice that God was the One who initiated the resolution of His damaged creation:

Genesis 3:15 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.

This was the first promise given after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Theologians call this the "first gospel" because these words that God spoke contain the first promise of redemption in the Bible. Everything else in the Bible flows from these words in Genesis 3:15. These words contain the plan of salvation. God would provide a Savior to rectify the mess Adam and Eve had caused. This passage points forward to the defeat of Satan by a future descendant of the woman. God would send His Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to restore the broken relationship between God and mankind. Jesus Christ is the ultimate offspring of the Woman who would one day come to crush the serpent's ugly head. In the process His "heel" would be bruised on the cross, but His resurrection on the third day would be victorious. This verse predicts that Jesus would win the victory over the Satan but would Himself be wounded at the same time.

By means of the first announcement of good news and the promise contained in it, God demonstrated that He had not abandoned mankind to the power of sin and death. He wished to rescue and save us. We are all under the curse of sin, but thanks be to God, we have a Savior. We have someone who has paid the debt of sin and has provided reconciliation to a broken relationship. God's first response to man's rebellion shows us from the beginning how God is infinitely just and at the same time infinitely merciful. From that first announcement God is manifested as the One who "so loved the world that He gave His only Son," who "sent His Son to be the payment for our sins," who "did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all." That is the Jesus that the world waited to have on the very first Christmas Day. God's promise to Adam and Eve began the long wait for the expectant Jesus.

Conclusion

The promise of God mentioned in the book of Genesis should strengthen our faith and motivate us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The world is full of people who are lost and on their way to hell. There are people who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who do not have a relationship with the Savior of mankind, who do not know the joy and peace Jesus brings. But that can change. God uses us to proclaim the good news that He loved us in such a way that He sent His one and only Son to pay the debt of sin that we

all owe. The baby Jesus is fulfillment of God's promise made as far back as the Garden of Eden and which culminated in the death and resurrection of our Savior.

When Charles Wesley wrote the familiar carol "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," he included a verse based on Genesis 3:15. Some hymnals omit this verse, but it contains excellent theology:

Come, Desire of Nations, come, Fix in us Thy humble home.
Rise the woman's conquering Seed, Bruise in us the serpent's head.
Adam's likeness now efface, Stamp Thine image in its place,
Second Adam from above, Reinstall us in Thy love,
Hark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us remember the great promise of God, that there is salvation. There is a Savior. Satan has been crushed. Victory is in Jesus. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!