

<sup>25</sup> The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

<sup>4</sup> "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup> He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"  
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,  
"Cursed are you above all livestock  
and all wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly  
and you will eat dust  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel."

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,  
"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;  
with pain you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you."

<sup>17</sup> To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat of it  
all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are  
and to dust you will return."

<sup>20</sup> Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup> The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. <sup>22</sup> And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." <sup>23</sup> So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup> After he drove them out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

### ■ Genesis 2:25-3

Look in your Bibles. Most of them will have a break between Genesis 2:25 and the first verse of chapter 3 –though Scripture in its original documents never has breaks like these. In that break will be two words: The Fall. Calling this “The Fall” implies a kind of individual falling, a personal disobedience that has private consequences. However, disobedience affects not just ourselves, but the complex web of relationships that we are born into. Like it or not, you were born a son or daughter, a citizen, a part of Creation, and human—and every single one of these relationships is

never as good as we want it to be because ultimately, all sin is relational sin. As such, calling it “The Fall” doesn’t go far enough. Maybe calling it “The Massive Collapse” is better—especially since it’s because of the Massive Collapse that the rest of biblical history gets written.

The first thing that catches our attention is that the man and woman were naked, and were unashamed. Some have thought that this might be biblical license to become nudists, but that’s not the point the text is trying to make. Nakedness is a sign of complete vulnerability, for as being naked implies, you really have nothing to hide. The man and woman were naked together, not just for sex, but because they weren’t hidden from each other. Married couples know: just because you’ve seen the other person naked and had sex doesn’t mean you know everything about the other person—a fact that most often comes out when you argue and realize that you are not as “one” as you thought you were.

We read next that the serpent was more “crafty” than the other animals—which is a deliberate play on words because “crafty” sounds a lot like “naked”<sup>1</sup> in Hebrew. Yet the serpent *isn’t* more vulnerable than the other animals. In fact, it’s just the opposite—it’s the one with the most secrets, the one with hidden intentions. And its intention is to cast doubt on the character of God. The serpent approaches the woman and says in a subtle way, “*did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?*” We don’t notice it at first because it’s such a subtle thing, but in an innocent-seeming question, the serpent focuses the woman on the negative aspect of God’s boundary for humanity. “*Here’s the fence,*” the serpent says. “*A fence made to keep you from being totally free.*”

The reality is there are boundaries to being human. But the innate limitations of being human don’t have much to do with God being jealous or afraid of us. The limitation of being human isn’t so much a fence to keep us in but more like a shape to life that helps define it. And what is this shape?

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<sup>1</sup> Hb: “arum” → “shrewd, crafty, cunning”

We were made to enjoy God and to depend entirely on him in trusting union and intimacy. Putting it another way, we were made to be naked with God and with each other.

There's something else here about the way the serpent gets at the woman. It's worth remarking on because over all this time, there really isn't much that's changed in the way the tempter gets at anyone. Instead of just questioning God's word, he slips in a virulent idea: "*God knows you will become like him, knowing good and knowing evil.*"<sup>2</sup> In that smallish sentence there is a world of misinformation that we have yet to stop believing. First, the serpent speaks a presumption of God—that the reason the man and woman weren't allowed to eat that fruit was because God doesn't want anyone to be like him. And second, the serpent implies that after eating the fruit, the woman will know good and evil.

If this were just a quick and dirty reading of the text, we might pause there and think "*oh, that's how we got our capacity for moral discernment! The fruit gave us power!*" Yet this isn't what Scripture is telling us, because the real temptation that Eve gives into is "*to be like God, knowing good and evil.*" In other words, the fundamental plague that makes us all sick is our desire to determine for ourselves what is good and what is evil apart from God. The serpent draws attention to the fence, and in our God-given freedom, we decide that the shape of our life with God and living in his understanding of reality isn't what we want. We get suspicious of God and say to ourselves "*what is God keeping us from when he keeps us behind a fence?*" ignoring all the while that being human means being by nature, limited. Thus the first sin isn't necessarily one of disobedience or theft, it's the inclination of our hearts to do what we want the way we want it. At the bottom of every sin you and I commit is the sin of Burger King—to have it our way.

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<sup>2</sup> Gen 3:5

So the woman sees the fruit: it's edible (pragmatic knowledge), it's pleasing to the eye (aesthetic appeal) and it's good for gaining wisdom (serves ambition). Only thing is, it's not necessarily Godly wisdom she's after. The word used here, *shaqal*, has a dark undertone to it that implies what she's looking for is common sense.<sup>3</sup> You may think it's common sense to obey God and keep his commandments (or do you) but Eve looks at the fruit and craves independence and something that helps her get ahead in life. As the scholar Bruce Waltke notes, "*What Adam and Eve sought from the tree was not philosophical or scientific knowledge ... but practical knowledge that would give them blessing and fulfillment.*"<sup>4</sup> This is the same expectation with which we still approach our lives. Sometimes, we become so obsessed with "what works" that we seek blessing and fulfillment in practicality rather than God, whose practicality always looks more than a little foolish. The longing to be our own source of personal meaning and fulfillment follows close on the heels of our hunger to lead a shapeless life.

We began by pointing out that the man and woman were naked and were unashamed, but after deciding that vulnerability with God and with each other wasn't what they really wanted, they don't just make coverings for themselves. They make a covering for the waist alone<sup>5</sup>; a loincloth that covers their genitalia. What this symbolizes isn't just modesty or embarrassment, but since sex is one of the greatest gifts of intimacy given to humanity, the covering of sex organs now means the loss of that intimacy. And, to put a finer point on it, these loincloths not only hide the man and woman from each other, but also hide their most intimate places from themselves. In our sin, we not only become estranged from each other, but blind to our true selves.

So begins our Great Collapse.

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<sup>3</sup> Hb: "shaqal" → intelligence, insight, knowledge; good, common sense"

<sup>4</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2001. p.91

<sup>5</sup> Hb: "chegorot" → "loincloths, aprons"

Soon after they hide, God walks in not just in “the cool of the day”, but in Hebrew, “the spirit of that time”.<sup>6</sup> He knows what’s gone on, but he doesn’t pronounce condemnation on them.

“Cursedness” is not necessarily God putting the curse on them, but stating a reality that we have brought upon ourselves. Maybe that’s a controversial thing for you to hear this morning, but even in the verses that follow, it’s not clear whether God is actually punishing humanity for the Collapse. What God *does* do is act justly by giving the man and woman a chance to explain themselves. He asks: “*where are you? Who told you? What have you done?*”

First collapse: “*This woman you put here, she gave it to me.*”<sup>7</sup> Not only does Adam blame the woman, he also blames God. “*You put her here—it’s your fault! Everything would have been fine if you’d have left me alone.*” In one short sentence, the man severs himself from trusting both God and the one of whom he said “*this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*”<sup>8</sup>

God doesn’t reply to that. He only turns to the woman and asks “what did you do?” Second Collapse. She replies, “*the serpent, this beast of the field that you made—it deceived me and I ate.*”<sup>9</sup> The final part of the Great Collapse is the way all of humanity is now at odds with the rest of Creation. We were made to live in trusting communion with God, ourselves, each other, and this good world; now there’s only frustration and suspicion.

The picture we get by reading this passage responsibly isn’t one of hierarchy (women are to blame and work is bad) or that God is vengeful and afraid of competition, but that what we think of as one individual sin is actually a catastrophic systems-wide failure. One “little” sin turns out to be not so “little” after all, because it’s *not* the action itself that separates us from God, it’s the heart in which it’s done. We wanted independence from God, and we got it. Yet the consequence of that

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<sup>6</sup> Hb: “l’ruach hayom” → “in the wind/spirit/breath of the day/time”

<sup>7</sup> Gen 3:12

<sup>8</sup> Gen 2:23

<sup>9</sup> Gen 3:13

independence is that instead of having his Spirit continually enlivening us, we live like we're drowning, gasping in breath we know won't be enough. When the core relationship for which we were made is torn out from our lives, we live as hollow men and women, constantly groping for ways to plug the fissure lest the weight of being crush us like empty pop cans.

This is significant because whenever we encounter suffering and evil in our world, we automatically ask the question "where is God?" This is nothing new, because if the Bible shows one thing at all, it's that generations of faithful people have asked that same question whenever tragedy touches our fragile lives. If there is one piece of evidence that atheists and agnostics continually appeal to in their denial of God, it's that if the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is real, then why does his goodness seem absent? The rain, they point out, falls on the righteous and the wicked. Blessings and curses happen to everyone. Why put your faith in a God who won't do anything to help?

The uniquely Christian reply is that God *does* something to help, but it isn't the kind of help we want. We want God to do his genie thing and blink evil away, yet that isn't what will work. In order for things to *really* change for the better, for God to finally get his own good way, he has to change the ones in whom he's vested his image: humanity. In order for things to finally be put to right, he has to begin where things went wrong, with us, with the way we are suspicious of him. God really is doing something, but the great "fix" for everything that's wrong starts with the first thing that went wrong: our lack of trust in him. By nature, we are not a people who want God or desire him or his ways—and so a restored bond with him is the first thing to be revived.

What God says to the serpent is telling. Aside from the way the serpent is segregated from the rest of creation<sup>10</sup> and has consigned itself to slither and eat dirt, there is a promise that is slipped in,

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<sup>10</sup> Hb: not "cattle", ("basar") but "bahemat" ("beasts")

almost underneath our glances. God tells the tempter, “*A man will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” It almost goes without saying that it is to this man that the rest of the biblical narrative looks forward to and centers around. This man is God’s compassionate and definitive response to all the cries of a world that suffers because of sin. This man is the one in whom, at long last, the serpent’s head will be crushed. Until then, what does God do? Where does he meet the world that he loves?

Even if you’re not into leather, when we read that God makes for Adam and Eve a set of clothes to allow them to keep their secrets, we see the gentle love of God that allows us the freedom to choose our own way. And then, when the consequences of our behaviour become apparent, God goes for a walk amongst us in the Spirit, gently drawing us out of hiding and meeting us in our shame, in our disgrace, in our rebellion. This is the importance of staying in context: we can’t read about the Great Collapse without remembering an even greater mercy. As the scholar Walter Bruggemann writes, “*With the sentence given, God does for the couple what they cannot do for themselves. They cannot deal with their shame. But God can, will, and does.*”<sup>11</sup>

So where do we go from here? Do we stay in the middle of the Great Collapse? Do we wallow in the wrack and ruin? That’s the great temptation for those of us who have experienced more than our fair share of suffering. Yet if we believe God and take him at his word and by his action, cynicism is not an option.

Instead, we learn to live in hope. Since in Jesus the divide between God and us is repaired, we *can* hope that every other relationship to which we belong will know *shalom*, the wholeness of God. We live on in hope knowing that though what often goes on in this life isn’t what God intends, there will come a time when he will finally get his good way. I don’t pretend to know what you’ve

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Waltke, p.95

gone through or how much it hurts, but I do know that our hope isn't foolish, but founded in the reality that there is no sin or evil that the love of God cannot overcome. So, hope. Hope that you will know the living God and learn to love him. Hope that even as you're filled with the Spirit, you won't be afraid as God works in and through you, revealing in you the deep places where he dwells. Hope that people can change and change for the better; that people we think are beyond the reach of God are caught from behind and bear-hugged into the Kingdom. Hope that we can love each other in vulnerability and intimacy even as we resist selfishness and give ourselves in relationship.

And, above all else, live in hope that what God shows about himself is true: that he meets us, no matter where we are along the journey, and walks with us in the cool of the day.