

The Christmas Curse

Genesis 3:14-15

Where in the Bible do you find the first presentation of the gospel? I think I learned the simple and straightforward answer to that question on one of the first days of one of my first classes in seminary. It's actually an easy question to answer, and as we end this Christmas season and look forward to the new year together, I want to take one more week away from our study of the book of Romans to stress the answer to that question for your benefit and encouragement. You may well know the answer already with much confidence, but if you don't I want you to learn it today. The first reference to the promise of the gospel. The first reference to Jesus as the savior of the world. If you like to hear Latin words or if you read theological books, the word is protoevangelium, literally translated "the first gospel."

The gospel is clearly pronounced throughout the Old Testament, in many places, with the prophetic declaration of the coming Messiah and the frequent references to the covenant promises of God. But where is that promise found first? Obviously, since I have already read the text for my sermon, you know that I am referring to Genesis 3:14-15. And I expect that you also know the context. The fall of mankind into sin. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, enjoying fellowship and communion with God their maker. We read in,

Gen. 1:31 "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

Indeed, it was very good! All that God had made was very good. There was no shame, no guilt, no sin. And then came the fall. The temptation of the serpent was successful, and Adam and Eve violated the one prohibition which God had given them,

Gen. 2:15 "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Yet they did eat of that tree.

Gen. 3:6 "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden."

Adam and Eve sinned, they rebelled against God by disobeying his command. And for that they were condemned, rightly so. At that moment, everything changed! They were condemned to death, the curse of death, as God had warned them. They were banished from the presence of God in the Garden of Eden and condemned to live out their lives on earth with a mortal and corruptible body for a finite, limited number of years, and then compelled to face the eternal judgment of God.

The climax of that curse is certainly in the words spoken to Adam, the curse of death.

Gen. 3:19 "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."

Thus we see that,

I. GOD PRONOUNCES HIS CURSE UPON SATAN.

The seed of the woman will crush the head of the seed of the serpent. In the great cosmic battle between good and evil, the seed of the woman will be victorious. Her seed, her descendant will win. And he is Jesus, as I will explain further in just a few minutes. For now, for this point, note that the seed of the serpent is none other than Satan himself. Jesus will conquer and defeat Satan. That's the promise of the gospel, pronounced as a curse, the Christmas curse if you will.

And just to demonstrate that I am not inappropriately making up all these interpretations, recognizing that the serpent is not simply an animal, but the devil himself, who has taken the form of this wise and clever animal, consider what Revelation 12:9 seems to make that clear,

Rev. 12:9 "The great dragon was hurled down --that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

The serpent is the devil, and he now lives and exists under the curse of God, awaiting the future, final fulfillment of that curse. That is what Paul writes in Romans 16:20, including the disciples of Jesus with him in his triumph over Satan,

Rom. 16:20 "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."

Back in Genesis 3, notice that God doesn't ask Satan a question, he doesn't ask for an explanation, as he had done with Adam and Eve. He simply pronounces the curse. There is no question about who has authority, who exercises power and control. It is God himself who speaks, and speaks with words of authority. He declares the curse upon the serpent, he himself inflicts that curse. God is under control, and the serpent is helpless to resist. No grace is shown to Satan, no glimmer of hope. Just a curse, which begins with,

A. A curse of humiliation.

v.14

The serpent is cursed to the place of total inferiority even to the other creatures, outwardly subjugated to the authority of God. Cursed to endure the humiliation of moving about with legs, on his belly. And cursed to endure the humiliation of being able to eat only the dust of the ground. No dignity, no freedom, no influence over any other creature. But condemned to an existence of crawling about on his stomach, the outward reality of that a symbol of the complete control of God over Satan.

Some speculate that perhaps the serpent, as a crafty and prudent animal, actually had the ability to stand erect before the fall, or at least to stand upon four legs. I suppose that is possible, and if so, it would certainly magnify the sense of this humiliation. But however the serpent moved about before the fall, after this curse his movements would be a demonstration of humiliation, degradation and even abomination.

He would be unable to walk or move like a proud animal, but able only to slither and slide on his belly. There is a sense in which we can feel that humiliation, for laying down on your stomach, even being forced to crawl upon your stomach, is a horrible experience of subjugation and humiliation. Imagine being forced to do such a thing yourself.

Satan was also cursed to eat dust. With no end in sight, no relief offered or ever to be hoped for. The curse would last all the days of his life. "Eating dust" is a familiar biblical expression of humiliation. It is not that serpents would literally obtain their food and nourishment from dust, but in every case the phrase means to be humbled or to suffer defeat.

Speaking of God's judgment upon the nations, we read in, Micah 7:16 "Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will lay their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf. 17 They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you."

Similarly,

Ps. 72:9 "The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust."

Satan would lick the dust, he will experience a continual suffering of defeat all the day of his existence. And the emphasis here isn't even upon his punishment, but rather upon his defeat and humiliation. The next verse speaks about his punishment, his eternal punishment.

B. A curse of death

v.15

No doubt, when Satan succeeded so quickly and so completely in tempting Adam and Eve, he must have thought he had won the war. He probably thought that he had won their allegiance, and that he would rule their lives and the lives of all their descendants. If those thoughts were in his mind, then he not only deceived Adam and Eve, he deceived himself. The woman, who had been his first prey and proved to be an easy victim, would not be his willing ally. God would see to it. Notice the curse of Satan--God would put enmity between the woman and Satan.

Now, that doesn't merely refer to the common reaction of women in great fear of snakes. Genesis 3:15 is not simply a

prophecy that women, as a general rule, won't like snakes. That may well be true for some of you, but God's words go far deeper. There will be unending enmity. Hatred. Hostility. Warfare. There would never be peace between the woman and Satan. God will put in the woman an undying opposition to the Evil One. And God incites that hostility himself, hostility that would be passed on from generation to generation. The seed of the woman, a plural word in the Hebrew, refers first to all the descendants of this woman, namely every single human being that has ever lived! The seed of Satan are those who would rightly be described as children of the evil one whose father is the devil. Jesus had no problem describing people that way. Remember,

John 8:44 "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

There would be ongoing, unending conflict, and the ultimate outcome of that conflict has been rendered absolutely certain. For Satan, the ultimate outcome will be defeat, death itself. Notice the curse upon Satan personally. The Seed of the woman, now focused on an individual man, "he", the one great personal descendant of the woman, will crush the head of Satan! And if there is any doubt that Jesus is the personalized seed of the woman who would bring about that defeat of Satan, several NT passages remove the doubt.

Col. 2:15 "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Also, Luke 10:18 "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Satan was cursed to an ultimate, eternal defeat, representing

by the words “bruise your head.” Sometimes that is translated with more clarity of meaning, “crush your head.” The point is obvious. Such a head injury is a mortal wound. Satan is cursed with death.

But that’s not all that we read about in Genesis 3. It’s not just a curse to the man and to the woman. Here at the point of condemnation upon mankind for the sin of Adam and Eve, as Satan is condemned to death, we also hear the curse pronounced upon Satan himself, the devil, the one who tempted Adam and Eve in the first place, the arch-enemy of God. God promises victory through the seed of the woman.

v.15

There is the first proclamation of the gospel. And it is absolutely astounding, because it comes in the context of a response to the sin of man. God could have simply condemned man for sin, nothing else, and he certainly would have been just. But here in Genesis 3, although there was a condemnation for sin pronounced, to be sure, and there was the sentence of death imposed upon mankind, there was also a sentence of condemnation upon the serpent—he who is himself the epitome and personification of evil, of Satan. And as that serpent is cursed by God, we see the promise of the incarnation. The seed of the serpent will be killed by the one whom God calls “the seed of the woman.” In other words, a descendant of Eve, a human being, will be the one by whom God will win the ultimate spiritual battle and conflict. The ultimate victory over evil, which only God himself can accomplish, will actually be accomplished by the seed of the woman. And there is only one way for that curse to be achieved, for God himself must become flesh. God himself must become a man, God incarnate; and only the God-man can be sufficient for that purpose.

So with this curse upon Satan,

II. GOD DECLARES THE PROMISE OF THE INCARNATION.

That’s why I’ve labelled it the Christmas curse. For with the curse comes the promise that the one true and living God would become man, he would become flesh, human flesh. And that’s what we read at the beginning of John’s gospel.

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

And that is what we read in the familiar Christmas story,

Mat. 1:18 “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

So the message of the gospel comes down to this,

A. A promise of the God-man.

The seed of the woman. This battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan is personalized. Seed is a plural word, but it is also appropriately focused in a climactic sense to one individual. And so this grand, eternal battle, set in place by God's curse upon the Serpent in Genesis 3, is ultimately a personal battle between Jesus and Satan. Thus God promises his son, the God-man, God with us, Immanuel. A divine nature inseparably joined together with a human nature, still the seance person of the Trinity, the eternal God. And also the seed of the woman. This is rightly identified as the central promise of the whole of the Old Testament—God would come to man in the flesh of a man. Immanuel.

But notice this very clearly, it is not just the promise of a baby. It is, rather,

B. A promise of triumphant victory.

And that's the declaration of the gospel. "He shall bruise your head," verse 15. He shall crush your head. That's the gospel. The victory of Jesus is declared, a victory actually obtained on the cross, through obedience of Jesus which resulted in his resurrection from the dead.

The Hebrew words in verse 15 are translated in the NKJV as "bruise."

v.15

Some translations help in our understanding by referring to Satan striking the head of the seed of the woman while that seed of woman would crush the head of the serpent, and while the Hebrew words are actually the same, that is the right understanding. If someone's head is struck or bruised, or crushed, the obvious meaning is death. Jesus would inflict upon Satan a mortal blow.

In the process, Satan would strike, or bruise, Jesus' heel. But a heel injury certainly doesn't indicate a mortal wound. Thus, Satan does bruise Jesus. He does strike his heel, bringing Jesus to the horrible experience of death upon the cross. As we read,

Isa. 53:5 "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

But the cross was not a mortal wound. For Jesus was raised from the dead! And that is the promise of triumphant victory. As I said before, the incarnation is not about a little baby in a manger in Bethlehem. It is about the triumphant victory of Jesus over Satan himself. The seed of the woman would, indeed, crush the head of the seed of the serpent. And thus, again, we read of Jesus' triumph in,

Col. 2:15 "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

Yet there is more, isn't there? More to come with reference to this ultimate curse upon Satan. We can go all the way to the end of the Bible, to the last book, and read,

Rev. 19:11 "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

And there is great encouragement in all of that, encouragement every one of us needs, every day. This declaration of the gospel triumph of Jesus is so practical, because it is our triumph as well, we who are united to Jesus. And, therefore, as a direct encouragement to you in a day when it seems like so much of this world is out of control, when evil and sickness and death seem to be dominant, not the power and influence of the gospel, in a day when true believers are often discouraged for any number of tangible reasons, this is what we read in Hebrews for our encouragement,

Heb. 2:14 “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

Beloved, that is the hope of the gospel, that this triumphant victory of Jesus will be ours. As we live by faith here and now, that triumphant victory is already ours. And we can, therefore, live without fear, without any danger that Satan will succeed, that the seed of the serpent might someone win this great cosmic battle. So this is our hope, our encouragement, this is the gospel, that...

Rom. 16:20 “...the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.”