

The Curse upon the Man

Genesis 3:17-19

This is our third week studying the curse which God pronounced upon mankind following the sin of Adam and Eve, and today we reach the climactic sentence of death. Ultimately, that is what the curse is all about about. Death. God gave man life, he breathed into him the breath of life. Physical life, in physical bodies. And spiritual life—in other words, communion with God. Adam and Eve had every benefit of access to the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden.

But under a covenant of works, under a probationary period in which they were tempted by evil, they sinned. They fell. And they died. They were subjected to the curse of death, and that death is pronounced in our text this morning, verse 16. Yet remember the last couple weeks. Last week, the curse upon the woman, a curse in which her distinctive role and function as a woman was cursed with the affliction of pain and suffering, as was her distinctive relationship with her husband. So we read,

v.16

Don't forget two weeks ago either, when God cursed the serpent, Satan himself. And don't forget the glory of verse 15, in which the curse of death and defeat upon Satan was also the occasion for the first declaration of the gospel in the Bible. God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent. In other words, Jesus would defeat the devil. And the rest of the Bible goes on to proclaim that glorious message of the gospel. But before all of that, a final word this morning about the curse of death, the curse upon the man.

Note first of all that it is,

I. A CURSE DESERVED.

Adam's guilt was evident, and God makes that explicit.

v.17 "Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake."

Adam sinned, and sinned incurs the sentence of guilt. The sentence of condemnation. That's the nature of sin. It cannot be overlooked. It cannot be ignored. Adam knew that, for God had warned him.

Gen. 2:16 "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."

As the Apostle Paul puts it so succinctly, "The wages of sin is death." Yet the original temptation of Satan remains a familiar ploy of the Devil to this day, denying the reality of that punishment.

v.4 "Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

You can sin, says the Devil, and not have to pay any of the consequences. You can ignore God, you can disobey God, you can rebel against God, and there won't be hell to pay, to use phrase appropriately that is so often used carelessly today. There won't be any consequences to your actions! That's still what people think today, when tempted by sin. They don't believe themselves to be accountable to God, or anyone else. They don't consider that they have to endure any negative consequences of their actions. So they sin...As did Adam. That's what happens when you believe a lie, the lie of Satan, when he says in temptation to you, "You will not surely die."

Adam found out that Satan was the one who was lying, and immediately both he and Eve became conscious of their guilt, expressed in the awareness of their nakedness.

v.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. 9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

So there they are, hiding in the embarrassed nakedness of their own guilt and shame. And as God pronounces judgment upon the man, the obvious reality is that he deserved it.

Specifically,

v.17 “Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake...”

Let me emphasize here just how much of a failure Adam was, how deeply sinful he was. There is a way of reading that verse is rather derogatory with reference to Eve and to women in general. The idea would be that Adam is rebuked for listening to his wife, as if the problem was really hers. And his sin was simply that he went along with her instead of realizing how gullible and easily tempted she was. I don’t believe any of that is implied here, but rather that Adam himself sinned by,

A. A failure to exercise the responsibility of leadership.

Remember his utterly abhorrent answer to God initially?

v.12 Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be

with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

It’s her fault. She tempted me. She led me astray. And it’s your fault, God, for giving her to me. That’s what he is saying, and what God says to him, to Adam, to the man, is not that all of this is somehow the woman’s fault, but that it is, at the end of the day, all Adam’s fault. The woman was deceived, she was deceived first, as Paul would later emphasize in 1 Timothy 2. But the point isn’t any inherent weakness in the woman, for Adam was just as quickly and easily deceived as she was. The point of verse 17 is that Adam bears greater guilt for greater sin because he had been given greater responsibility!

Thus he failed, he sinned, not only in eating the forbidden fruit, but he also sinned in very abdication of his leadership. So when God condemns Adam with the words, “because you have heeded the voice of your wife,” he is not declaring the woman to be inferior to the man but rather declaring Adam’s sin to be more heinous, more offensive. Eve was tempted, and sinned. Adam’s sin goes deeper than that, more foundational. Adam failed to exercise his responsibility. He failed to judge sin for what it was. He failed to resist temptation. And at the root of all that sin, he failed in the responsibility which God gave him as the head of his wife. When he listened to Eve and ate the fruit with her, Adam incurred God condemnation for that failure. He was condemned by God for his failure to lead and protect his wife, a failure made so abundantly obvious by his willingness to blame her for his faults!

Dare I say that many a man still does that today! Blames a woman for a fault that rests within a man. To make one very practical and obvious application specifically, how often does a man blame his sin of lust upon the appearance of a woman? I’m not suggesting immodesty in a woman’s appearance in any way,

but neither am I willing to blame a woman for the sin of a man's heart. Or anger. How many a man has excused his own anger, or the unkindness and harshness of his own words, because he claims to have been provoked by what a woman has said or done. But Jesus says, in both those circumstances, that the sin comes from the heart. And to speak with reference to gender, the sin of a man comes from the heart of a man, and until we realize and come to terms with that, we are prone to commit the same sin as Adam did, blaming the woman for his own offense. And God would have none of that, cursing Adam because he "heeded the voice of [his] wife."

Adam deserved that curse. And he also deserved it because of,

B. A failure to submit to the authority of God.

Simply put, Adam knew what God had said. And whatever Eve may or may not have said to him to tempt him, he still knew what God had said. "...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." Plain and simple, Adam failed to submit to the authority of God.

v.17 "Because you ... have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it'..."

That's why he was condemned. That's why he was cursed. Ultimately, the sin was the sin of rebellion. Ultimately, every sin is the sin of rebellion. That is the reality we have to confront, even in our own hearts to this day. Every willingness to sin, every vulnerability we have in our temptations, comes from this concept of rebellion, this failure to submit. God had commanded Adam in no uncertain terms, "You shall not eat of that one tree..." Adam rebelled against that command, and he ate. He deserved the curse.

Note then, secondly, that this curse upon Adam is,

II. A CURSE UPON HIS DISTINCTIVE FUNCTION AS A MAN.

That was abundantly obvious in the curse upon the woman, with the curse of suffering upon the whole process of bearing children, the distinctive function of women. In parallel, it is worth noting that for the man, his distinct function is providing for life. It's not as absolute as the distinctive function of women, for despite the wicked foolishness of our day, men cannot bear children. Yet women are not exclusively unable to contribute to the work necessary for the sustenance of life, but in broad terms, that responsibility falls first of all to the man.

In the context of widows rightly needing and receiving the help and benefit of the church for their basic needs of life, Paul makes such a bold statement in,

1 Tim. 5:8 "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

So a man who refuses to work, who refuses to be diligent in the pursuit of meeting the earthly and material needs of his family, "has denied the faith." What an amazing declaration. And how all of this is relevant to our subject today is that this curse which proclaims is upon that very labor to which God has called men. That labor of a man, comparable to the woman's labor in childbirth, will be harsh and grievous. So now, with the curse, providing for the needs of life, tending the garden, means that you now have to labor and toil. The was work before the fall, and there will be work remaining in heaven. But not toil. No labor. No hardship or toil. All of those things came upon man in the curse God pronounced upon him.

v.17b "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat

of it All the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground.”

It is,

A. A curse upon the necessary labors of life.

Now there are thorns and thistles. There are a lot of other obstacles too, aren't there? Now the sun gets to hot so many things are unable to grow. Now the rain sometimes comes so hard that it brings flooding; or winds so strong they bring destruction. Now there is the danger of fire and the harm of storms. Even the ground is cursed...because Adam sinned!

Now, since the fall, since the curse, our labor is toilsome. Even as God will continue to provide for the food that we need, even as God will continue to supply what is necessary for life on earth to continue, there will be constant obstacles and unending hardship. Now when a man seeks to provide for his own household he will be able to accomplish that only by the sweat of his brow!

So we work, we are called to work, and our work can be very hard. That is because of Adam's sin. And so we live in a fallen world, a world subject to God's curse, a curse that extends to the whole of this created world in which we live.

Sometimes I fear that we teach young people wrongly when we teach them that they should always love their job; and we teach them to quit if they don't, as if loving your work is a necessary part of it. But it's not, it's not necessary. It is a blessing, to be sure, to enjoy the labor which God gives you upon the earth. Give thanks and praise to God when you have that blessing. But that joy isn't a guarantee, and neither is that joy

ever totally disconnected from this concept of labor and toil. Because of sin, because of the curse, we are condemned to gain our sustenance in life only by the exertion represented by the sweat of our brow and from the toilsome labor of our hands.

And that principle is easily extended to be seen and understood as,

B. A curse upon the whole of creation.

In a very real sense, this whole created world is against us. That is, the forces of nature are now, in themselves, all subject to the effects of this curse. There are obvious examples, such as this current heatwave, some places up well over 100 degrees, day in and day out. There are tornadoes afflicting many parts of our country, and we will soon be in hurricane season on the coast. There are often wild fires out west, and the disastrous smoke from those Canadian fires are still affecting the quality of our air even this far south. Things freeze in the winter, and even when conditions are good for growing things, you have to deal continuously with weeds.

There are virus that float through the air we breath, some incredibly and tragically deadly. The whole world experiences such plague just three years ago. And then, there are some animals who have become pests, even predators, bringing harm wherever they exist. Such that we need to realize, and say clearly, that the whole of creation is now subjected to the effects of the curse. No longer can we say that everything is good. It is not. The whole of God's creation suffers under the curse pronounced upon Adam. Surely that is the point Paul is making in,

Rom. 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the

creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

Such astounding words. “The creation was subjected to futility.” “The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” The whole creation was cursed. Because of Adam’s sin! The whole creation was cursed, because man fell into sin. Everything was ruined, everything because subject to death. And that is the focal point of God’s curse. As I’ve emphasized, death is the climax of that curse.

III. A CURSE UPON LIFE ITSELF.

Gen. 2:17 “...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.”

That’s why the creation is groaning, as I just read from Romans 8. That’s ultimately the futility to which all creation is subject, with mankind, the futility of death. As Romans 8 puts it, “the bondage of corruption.”

It is a bondage, isn’t it?

A. The curse of a mortal and corruptible body.

Who of you can escape that bondage? Can you avoid sickness and disease? Can you live with a freedom from such things? Can you escape the effects of growing older? Can you resist the effects of arthritis, or the deterioration of your joints? Can you escape the ravages of cancer, or kidney disease? Can you preserve the wellness of your heart, the free flow of blood in your arteries, or the fullness of your lung capacity? Can you preserve the strength of your youth or even the sharpness of your

mind? Can you choose to live without the bondage of a mortal and corruptible body?

No, you can’t. Because of the curse, we live under that inescapable bondage of a body, a physical body, that is now mortal. Subject to death. And that curse of mortality came upon Adam and Eve immediately. They didn’t drop dead when God cursed them, but compared to their state before the fall, they were as good as dead. They became subject to death, enduring life now only through the groaning and suffering associated with their corruption.

I should note at this point, that it is this curse of death that is the focus of the hope of the gospel, because it is in this context of death in which the gospel proclaims life. That’s the glory for which we wait, but which we expect and long for. The glory of life. The glory of physical life again made incorruptible, and immortal. So it is this curse that teaches us what the hope of the gospel is all about, which might simply be called the resurrection. Resurrection means that you can escape the curse of a mortal and corruptible body. And that is the gospel!

1 Cor. 15:42 “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”

So this sermon is not simply about the curse, but rather the focus of the gospel is upon the removal of that curse, a promise made evident in the promise of our resurrection with Jesus. And ultimately, that means that the ultimate curse is removed.

B. The curse of death.

Death is the curse Adam received. It wasn't just that there would be thorns and thistles growing in the garden. Adam and Eve would die. As a result of the curse, their bodies would grow old. They would be subject to sickness and disease, injury and harm, and they would die. In the words of the curse itself, their bodies would return to dust.

v.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."

There it is, the wages of sin. Physical death, representing what is even worse, death as being separated from God, which we will see next week. But for today, let the severity of this curse weigh heavily upon you, the curse of death, a curse none of us can escape. "For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."

Let me go back to 1 Corinthians at this point, noting the inevitable consequence of this curse of death, as I note the very central truth of the promise of the gospel.

1 Cor. 15:50 "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then

shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So the curse of death is the occasion for me to preach to you the gospel, which is nothing less than the only means of escaping that curse. The hope of life, the promise of the resurrection, is the only thing that can enable to you live in the world still affected by the curse. The gospel is your only hope. Otherwise, without Jesus, the only thing that remains, the only thing that will be certain and inevitable, is death itself.

But the gospel reverses that curse. Jesus endured that curse, becoming a curse for you, if you would but believe in him. So that in him, rather than being subject to death, you might have life everlasting. Peter calls that a living hope, the hope of life, and for that hope he gives much praise.

1 Peter 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

And so I proclaim to you life this day, life that is found only through faith in Jesus Christ. If you don't yet have that life, please talk to me even today, that today might be the day of salvation. And if you already have that life, if you already have that faith in Jesus, then fix your eyes upon the glory that shall be yours when you, too, will be raised from the dead.

So as I preach on the curse of death, this is the message I have to proclaim, “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

1 Cor. 15:57 “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”