

What's Wrong With the World? "Fully Known & Fully Loved"

Genesis 3:7-10, 21

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on February 21, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Genesis 3.
- Karl Menninger was a world famous psychiatrist who died in 1990. He was not a Christian but he wrote a famous book called *Whatever Became of Sin?* It shocked a lot of people because he called for a revival of the concept of sin. Why do that? Won't people be more depressed if we tell them they are guilty of sin?
 - Menninger argued the opposite: ***"The assumption that there is sin in it somewhere implies both a possibility and an obligation for intervention...Hence sin is the only hopeful view. When evil appears around us and no one is responsible and no one is guilty ... then no moral questions are asked, and then there is, in short, nothing to do, we sink to despairing helplessness. Therefore I say that the consequence of my proposal would not be more depression, but less. If the concept of personal responsibility and answerability for ourselves and for others were to return to common acceptance, hope would return to the world with it!"***¹
- So this world famous psychiatrist is saying that your mental health and happiness are directly tied to your understanding of sin. The Bible agrees.
 - This is why we are going back to Genesis 3, which is the story of how sin came into the world.
- Over the last few weeks, we have looked at what sin is. Today we will look at what sin does – what it does to us. We have already defined sin. Over the next few weeks we will look at how sin damages us.
 - This passage is so profound because it vividly shows us why our lives are so messed up. It shows why you are often so unhappy, why you struggle

¹ Karl Menninger, *What Ever Became Of Sin?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 218-219. The entire quote is: "And what would be the good of that? someone asks. Do we need -more breast-beaters? Shall we add depression to the already mentioned gloom and world uneasiness? Why not a "no-fault" theology, equivalent to no-fault casualty insurance: no one to blame? Things just happen, alas? The assumption that there is sin in it somewhere implies both a possibility and an obligation for intervention. Presumably something is possible which can be reparative, corrective, meliorative, and that something involves me and mercy - we want them, too. But we want to think we can help ourselves and our fellows if only a modicum.

Hence sin is the only hopeful view. The present world miasma and depression are partly the result of our self-induced conviction that since sin has ceased to be, only the neurotics need to be treated and the criminals punished. The rest may stand around and read the newspapers. Or look at television. Do your thing and keep your eye on the road leading to the main chance.

As it is, vague, amorphous evil appears all about us, and when this or that awful thing is happening and this terrible thing goes on and that wretched circumstance has developed, and yet, withal, when no one is responsible, no one is guilty, no moral questions are asked, when there is, in short, just nothing to do, we sink to despairing helplessness. We wait from day to day for improvement, expectantly but not hopefully.

Therefore I say that the consequence of my proposal would not be more depression, but less. If the concept of personal responsibility and answerability for ourselves and for others were to return to common acceptance, hope would return to the world with it!"¹

in relationships, why you get exhausted from being a perfectionist, why you get depressed about your looks, why you tell little white lies, and why you have this driving need to prove yourself.

- More importantly, however, this passage shows how you find freedom from these things, how you can increase in joy, and how you can possess a deep inner security no matter what is going on in your life.
- As you can see, all of this has to do with the themes of nakedness and clothing. So I am going to develop today's passage in three parts.
 - Part 1: The reality of our nakedness. Part 2: The inability to cover our nakedness. Part 3: The God who clothes our nakedness.²

THE REALITY OF OUR NAKEDNESS

- So let's begin with **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** the reality of our nakedness.
 - In this point we will see our need to admit there is something wrong with us. We are always downplaying this or even denying it. In our day it is emphasized that happiness comes from rejecting ideas of sin and believing that you are perfect just the way you are. But as Menninger argues, and as Genesis 3 argues, the only way to restore mental health is to begin by admitting personal responsibility – our sin. Let's look at the text.
 - Look at verse 7. **READ 7** – *“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.”*
- At one level this is a very simple passage to understand. Adam and Eve disobey God, realize they are naked, feel shame, and try to cover themselves. It's about physical nakedness. But as you look at it, you realize it is far deeper than this.
 - We know this because they were naked *before* they ate the fruit and they were perfectly fine with this. Look back at chapter 2:25 it says, *“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”*
 - So it's not like they were physically blind and the fruit healed their eyes so that they suddenly said, *“Oh my goodness, we're naked. We'd better cover up.”*
 - No, they were already naked but now there is a new awareness of their nakedness that leads to shame, fear, and hiding. So this is clearly not just about being physically naked. It is about the affects of disobeying God.
- Let me put it this way: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** to be naked means to be fully known. It means to be known in a way that nothing is hidden. To be known in a way that is totally transparent. We can mean this literally but also metaphorically.
 - Before they disobeyed, Adam and Eve could look upon their own inner psychological selves and feel good about who they were because they had done nothing wrong. Also, they fully knew each other and they loved each

² This sermon borrows thoughts and illustrations from a few sermons by Timothy Keller including, “Nakedness and the Holiness of God” (March 21, 1993), “Paradise Promised” (November 12, 2000), “East of Eden” (November 19, 2000), and “Made for Relationships” (October 29, 2000).

other. Furthermore, when felt the eyes of God looking into the depths of their souls, they felt no shame because nothing was wrong with them.

- In every way they were fully known *and* fully loved.
- But when Adam and Eve disobeyed everything changed.
 - Notice that they become psychologically alienated from their own selves. It says they “realized” they were naked. They suddenly felt in the core of their beings that there was something wrong with them.
 - This leads them to be socially alienated from each other. They cannot stand being exposed before each other’s eyes and so they try to cover themselves from each other.
 - Third, they are spiritually alienated. They cannot stand being seen by God. They are filled with fear and try to hide from God.
- So Genesis 3 is teaching us something profound about ourselves. As we have seen it is showing us that we want to be fully known and fully loved.
 - But it is also showing us that **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** we cannot stand to be naked (fully known) before the eyes of others or God because we know there is something wrong with us.
 - Furthermore, since we know there is something wrong with us, we fear that being fully known will lead to rejection (not being fully loved).

NIGHTMARES AND THE LOOK

- Think about the common nightmare where you are caught standing naked in front of a group of people. It’s very traumatic. You feel an inner psychological sense of shame that makes you want to run and hide.
 - But why? What’s going on here? Is it not because everyone can see all your flaws and imperfections? And when they know you so fully like that they laugh at you and reject you.
 - You cannot stand to be fully known because it reveals your flaws, which leads to rejection.
- Let me put it another way. Imagine you are in a room filled with T.V. screens. These screens show a live video feed from hidden cameras in someone else’s house – someone you know but don’t like very much. You get to watch all they do and listen to every conversation they have.
 - It is a rather intoxicating experience because you quickly see them for who they really are, not who they present themselves to be. You quickly see what a fraud they actually are. You listen to them get angry with their spouse and kids. You see all their secret habits. You know what they really look at on the computer and watch on their T.V. They are exposed and you know who they really are.
 - One day as you finish your breakfast before going to watch the screens, something catches your eye up in the corner of the wall. You think it is a spider but upon closer inspection you realize it is not a spider at all. It’s a tiny camera lens. Suddenly it dawns on you - someone is secretly looking at you. In a panic you search the

house and find cameras in every room. You were the watcher but now you are the watched.³

- In that moment you are enraged. You feel violated and dehumanized. But why? There was a certain sense of delight in seeing the other person for who they really are. You saw behind the façade and saw their faults.
 - But now you are outraged when you are the one being watched. Why is that? Because now someone else knows whom you really are. You have been exposed. You are shown to be a fraud.
 - Be honest, if all your thoughts were displayed on a screen for all to see and hear would you not be totally embarrassed? You would not be able to minimize anything or make yourself look better. You would be exposed for who you really are.
- So I am simply showing us what we already know; namely, that there is something seriously wrong with us.
 - Genesis 3 says that what is wrong with us is that we, like Adam and Eve, have rebelled against our Creator. When we reject our Maker we, like Adam and Eve experience an inner psychological alienation from our own selves, alienation from other people, and alienation from God.
 - So the Bible is saying, “***Stop denying or minimizing that there is something wrong with you. You already know it is true.***” This sounds depressing but as Dr. Menninger argues this is the first step toward hope. For if we take responsibility for what is wrong there is hope that it can be made right.

THE INABILITY TO CLOTHE OUR NAKEDNESS

- Let’s turn to the second part of the message now and talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** the inability to cover our nakedness.
 - Adam and Eve cannot stand to be truly known and so they try to make themselves feel better by covering their nakedness.
 - Look at verse 7. **READ 7** – “***Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths.***”
- If this were not so tragic it would be funny. Clearly fig leaves do a poor job of covering. Leaves rip and tear. They wither and die. They don’t really protect the skin and I’m guessing they are kind of drafty.
 - Again though, this is not just about covering physical nakedness. It is about trying to cover that deeper inner sense that there is something wrong with them. This is clear because if it was just about physical nakedness then after they put on the fig leaves they should have felt secure and happy. Life should have gone back to normal.

³ This illustration inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: The Citadel Press, 1956), 235-236. Sartre uses the image of looking through a keyhole only to hear someone in the hallway behind him and realize he is being looked at through the keyhole.

- Yet success is just a fig leaf. Oh yes, it covers a little but no amount of achievement, no amount of degrees, no amount of status, can fully cover that deep inner sense of inadequacy.
- Why do some of us care so much about our physical appearance? Why do you get depressed when you feel ugly? Is it not because you think, ***“If I am attractive then I have value in myself and others will like me?”***
 - But this is just a fig leaf. You know this because, like a fig leaf, your physical beauty will literally wither and fade. It cannot cover you.
- Why do you tell little white lies?
 - Is it not to try and cover up areas where you are wrong and so others will think well of you. Lies are fig leaves.
- Or think about perfectionism. Perfectionists are trying so hard because they cannot stand to be viewed as inadequate or let other people down.
 - But this is a fig leaf because there is always more to do and it exhausts the person and everyone around them.
- Or think about world religions and spiritual paths. The Bible says they are all just fig leaves. They are human attempts to try and make ourselves presentable to God by doing all kinds of spiritual rituals.
 - But the Bible says all of these are fig leaves. “But I meditate!” Fig leaves. “But I go to church!” Fig leaves. “But I give my money away!” Fig leaves. “But I live a good moral life!” Fig leaves.
 - None of these things can cover our nakedness before God. We try to deny it and cover it up but there is something deeply wrong with us. The Bible calls this something “sin.”
- It’s like in the classic fairytale *Cinderella*. She lives in rags and cannot go to the palace ball. The fairy godmother gives her a magical dress that covers her rags but it is really just a fig leaf.
 - When the clock begins to strike midnight the magic wears off and Cinderella has to flee lest the prince see her for who she really is. If he sees her for who she really is then she is convinced he won’t love her.
- So there you have it. The Bible traces all our problems back to sin. We know there is something wrong with us. Rather than admit it we try to cover it up in all manner of ways. Yet all these coverings are fig leaves.
 - So what should we do then? We’ve tried everything. Are we just doomed to putting on facades? Doomed to controlling what others see? Doomed to being unpresentable before God?
 - No, for as Menninger said, if sin is real then there is hope for intervention. And that is exactly what God did with Adam and Eve and what he wants to do with you right now.

THE GOD WHO CLOTHES OUR NAKEDNESS

- Having looked at the reality of our nakedness and our inability to cover our nakedness we are now ready for the happy news of the Bible. We will now look at **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** the God who clothes our nakedness.

- In verse 7 Adam and Eve vainly try to cover themselves. In verse 21 they receive the covering of another. **READ 21 – And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.**
 - What a gracious God! God saw right through their fig leaves. He knows them and what they did. And yet he does not hurt them. Rather, he clothes them. God is here saying, ***“I and I alone can clothe your nakedness.”***
- But the clothing God provided was different than what they expected. Their sin could not be covered by a handful of leaves. Their sin could only be covered by pain and blood. This clothing required the death of an animal for notice they were garments made of skin. A life had to be taken in order for them to be clothed. There was no easy way to restore what was lost.
 - God would develop this concept into the sacrificial system. The Israelite people would sacrifice a lamb and God would cover their sins making them presentable before God.
 - Again though, it is God alone who can cover sin and this covering costs a life.
- How shocking then when John the Baptist saw Jesus he cried out, ***“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*** A man will be the sacrifice? Yes. This one sacrifice can take away, not just cover, our sin? Yes.
 - You see, Jesus came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We cannot cover our sin but Jesus can take it away. Jesus was stripped naked for us. He was exposed for all to see. He bore our shame. He was sacrificed on the cross. His blood was shed. His life was taken.
 - So here is the good news of Christianity for you: **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** First, that Jesus will cleanse us of what’s wrong with us (our sin that makes us unpresentable). Second, Jesus will clothe us in his own righteousness (his moral perfection that makes us presentable to God).
- Just as the prince went out in search of the ragged clothed Cinderella, Jesus went out in search of you. Just as the prince took away her rags, Jesus takes away the rags of your sin. Just as the prince took her as his bride, so Jesus takes us as his bride. Just as she was clothed as a bride and so was forever welcome in the palace, Jesus clothes us in his righteousness so we are forever welcome in God’s presence.
 - Listen, God knows you. His eyes see all of who you are. As Hebrews 4:13 says, ***“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*** In one sense this is terrifying for if he knows us so fully, will he not reject us? That’s what other people do.
 - But God did not reject us. Just as he sought out Adam and Eve and clothed them, so also he gave the life of his own Son that we might be presentable to him. Listen, God knows you and he loves you.
- I will never forget one evening when we were camping in Oregon. As I sat in my lawn chair watching the sun go down, I was overwhelmed with my own sin. I felt

the eyes of God. I felt exposed. I felt shame. Like Adam and Eve I could feel my soul shrinking back from God.

- And then with soul soothing tenderness God spoke the words of Hebrews 2:11 to me where it says of Jesus that, ***“He is not ashamed to call us brothers.”*** What hope! God knows me. I am naked before him. And yet, because of what Christ has done, he is not ashamed of me.
- This is why we sang,
 - ***My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.***
- This is why we sang,
 - ***When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.***
- This is why we sang,
 - ***When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me***
- This is why we will sing,
 - ***No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th’eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.***
- So you see our passage is telling us that **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** when we receive the clothing God offers (the righteousness of Jesus) we possess a deep inner psychological sense of security. For listen if God knows you and loves you then it changes everything about how you relate to yourself and others.
 - When you are clothed with Jesus’ righteousness you can work hard and achieve but you no longer have to do it to try and be somebody. In Jesus you are fully known and fully loved. You are somebody.
 - You are free from having to live by the opinions of others because the only opinion that really matters has seen the darkest parts of your heart and loved you to the point of death.
 - You are free from having to base your self-worth on how attractive you are because dressed in Jesus’ robes you are stunningly beautiful to God.
 - Listen Cinderella, you don’t need to fear. You don’t need to be so anxious. Remember who you are now. You are the bride of Jesus. You are clothed in his righteousness. You are known and loved.

- Drop the fig leaves. Come out from the behind the tree. Stop hiding from God. He sees through your fig leaves anyways.
 - Admit that you need Jesus to take away your sin and clothe you in his righteousness. Receive his gift and then rest in the deep assurance that God knows you and love you. **(SHOW SLIDE 11)**

Father in heaven, I admit that I have sinned against you. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, I am asking you to cleanse me of my sin and to clothe me in Jesus' righteousness. Thank you that, in Jesus, I am fully known and fully loved. Amen.