

What's Wrong With The World?

"Hope For Dark Days"

Genesis 3:14-15, 20

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 6, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Genesis 3.
- You don't have to be a Christian to understand the power of hope. Victor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist who was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp in World War II. He wrote a famous book entitled, *Man's Search For Meaning*. He describes what happened to prisoners who lost hope. They simply stopped talking and eating. They would not get out of their bed even to go to the bathroom. Such people would die within a few days. Frankl writes,
 - *"Any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal...Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a why—an aim—for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost."*¹
- It is so easy to lose hope in a world that is so filled with evil.
 - It is easy to lose hope when there seems to be no end to the atrocities of ISIS, when 140 million children remain orphaned, when 27 million people are currently enslaved in human trafficking, and, when only 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police but in just one year Canadian women reported 460,000 incidents of sexual assault.²
 - I confess that all of this overwhelms me.
 - But it is not just the evil out there. When we are honest, we can also be overwhelmed by the darkness within our own hearts. Why is my heart so self-centred? Why do I cause pain to those closest to me like my wife and kids? Why am I so uncaring? Why am I impatient and angry?
- In this series we are seeing that the Bible says all of this evil came into our world when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and tried to rule themselves. Like an oil spill pollutes the ocean, Adam and Eve's actions spiritually polluted God's good creation with evil.
 - But we are also seeing that God is on a mission to depollute his creation. Genesis 3 is about evil, sin, and judgement but we are seeing that this whole chapter is shot through with the hope that God is doing something about it.
- Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in our passage today. Despite the fact that Adam and Eve have just confessed their disobedience in eating from the forbidden tree, God does *not* begin by telling them the consequences for their sin.
 - Rather, God begins by telling them how he will overcome evil. Despite the fact that their whole world is collapsing around them, God

¹ Victor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), Kindle Edition, Location 1009.

² Samuel Perreault and Shannon Brennan. *Statistics Canada*. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2010002/article/11340-eng.htm#a3>>

immediately wants to instill a sense of hope in them – a hope that things will not always be like this.

- Here is the main point of today's message: We must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God will overcome evil. So in order that we may gain hope let's look at this theme of God overcoming evil.

GOD HAS PRONOUNCED JUDGEMENT ON EVIL

- First then, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** we must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God has announced a humiliating defeat for evil.
 - In our passage today God confronts the serpent for what he has done. Look at verse 14. **READ 14** - ***“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.”***
- Some commentators believe this verse is saying that the serpent once stood upright or had legs but God now curses the serpent to crawl on its belly. Others say God simply uses the serpent's crawling as an image of defeat.
 - Whatever the case, it seems clear that God is cursing both the serpent and Satan who stands behind the serpent.
- Notice how this verse is in direct contrast to 3:1. In 3:1 we read, ***“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.”***
 - But now notice in verse 14 that the crafty one is cursed. Notice also the comparison to the other animals. God is not saying in verse 14 that all the animals are cursed and the serpent is cursed more than the rest. God is saying that out of all the animals, the serpent alone is cursed on the basis of what he did.
 - What irony! He who was craftier than all the animals, is now singled out from the animals for cursing.
- The curse is described in the second half of verse 14. **READ 14b** - ***on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.***
- This is literally true of snakes but God is also using that as an image of humiliating defeat.
 - In the Bible eating dust and crawling on one's belly is a way of speaking about humiliation. Even today we say, ***“eat my dust.”*** If a runner blows by another runner and says this he is saying, ***“You are going to lose so badly it is going to be humiliating.”***
- The Bible uses it in this sense many times. In Isaiah 49:23 God says of Israel's enemies that, ***“They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet.”*** This is a metaphorical way of saying that Israel's enemies will be experience a humiliating defeat. Likewise, Micah 7:17 says that when the nations see God in his power, ***“They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground.”***
 - So it seems that God is saying, ***“The serpent is the symbol of evil and when you see a snake slithering with its belly on the ground with its***

tongue having to lick the dust, I want you to remember that I will bring the devil and all evil to a humiliating defeat.”

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD AND IT IS NOT SATAN

- What a timely message of hope for Adam and Eve. The serpent has just quickly and easily defeated them. They feel shame. They feel fear. God is about to tell them the consequences of their rebellion and they are about to be cast out of the garden and into a world where evil will reign. They have, and will have, every reason to despair.
 - But *before* God speaks of judgement and *before* he casts them out, he speaks a message of grace that fills them with hope. God announces that, like a snake crawls on its belly and licks the dust, evil will eventually face a humiliating defeat.
- Oh what hope there is for us in this! So often it seems that evil is in control of the world. I don't think I can handle many more stories of young girls being sold into the sex trade. I'm not sure how many more gravesides I can preside over where the length of the coffin is two feet. Evil just seems too powerful.
 - But here at the beginning, when evil first enters the world, God announces a humiliating defeat for evil. We are not told yet how this will happen but Satan's response should fill us with hope. How does Satan respond to God? Does he laugh in mockery at God's curse? Does he defy God to his face? What is Satan's response? Silence.
 - He who spoke and attacked God's character is silenced before the Creator. He who called God a liar behind his back can make no response when he is before God's face. He who boasted of wisdom and power is cowering in the dust.
- You see there is only one God and Satan is not his name. You should *not* think of God and Satan as yin and yang. They are *not* equal but opposite powers. They are *not* the dark and light side of the force.
 - You should *not* imagine God and the devil as a white dog and a black dog fighting with each other for control of the universe. Oh yes, Satan is a rabid dog but he is a dog on a chain and God is his master.
 - Let hope fill your heart then for there is only one God. Satan cannot stop God's announcement of his defeat anymore than an ant can stop a bulldozer.
- We must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God has announced a humiliating defeat for evil.

GOD WILL CAUSE MANY PEOPLE TO DEFECT FROM EVIL

- **(SHOW SLIDE3)** Second, we must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God will cause many people to defect from evil.
 - Satan had himself rebelled against God and now he has lured Adam and Eve into joining his rebellion. The devil was victorious in the garden. God's plan of the earth being filled with image bearers who worship him seemed all but lost. Now it seems God's earth will be filled with people who follow the serpent in disregarding God and living for themselves.

- But in verse 15 God immediately declares war on the serpent. In this war God says he will win people back to himself. He will cause them to defect from the serpent.
- First, we see that God will win Eve back to himself. **READ 15a** - ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman.”***
 - Enmity means hatred and hostility. God says he will cause Eve to hate the serpent and his ways. What a change from before. Satan and the woman had been on friendly terms. She believed he was looking out for her best interests. She took his advice and joined his side.
 - But now God says he will change Eve’s heart. He will put a hatred of the serpent in her heart. She will defect. Satan has just lost his first ally.
- Second, God will also cause many of Eve’s descendants to defect. Look again at verse 15. **READ 15a** - ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.”***
 - What does Satan’s offspring refer to? It does not mean Satan will father little baby devils. God is saying that Satan will be the father of many human beings in the sense that they will believe his beautiful lie.
 - This lie says, ***“God is holding you back. If you want true happiness then live for yourself and make up your own rules.”***
- This is what Jesus was getting at in John 8 when he rebuked the people for rejecting him. He says, ***“If God were your Father, you would love me...”*** So there are people who have God as their Father. The evidence that God is your Father is found in the fact that you love the Father’s Son, Jesus.
 - But then Jesus says there is another race of people. He asks, ***“Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.”*** Why are they unable to hear? Jesus says it is because ***“You belong to your father, the devil.”***
 - So the serpent’s offspring are those who follow his beautiful lie.
- But again we see that God strikes Satan with another blow. It is not just Eve’s heart that God will cause to turn against the serpent. Satan thought he had gained the whole human race but now God says He will turn many of Eve’s descendants against the serpent.
 - This is hope. God will not allow the whole human race to be taken over by the evil one. He will change hearts. This is why Jesus says, ***“I will build my church and gates of hell will not stand against it.”***
 - Gates defend a city. Jesus is saying that he will storm the castle of evil. He will smash down the gates. He will enter the kingdom of darkness and rescue people from the power of the evil one so they can have God as their Father.
- God is in the business of winning hearts back to himself. He opens our eyes to the devil’s lies. God causes us to see his beauty and worth.
 - So we must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God will cause many to defect from evil.

GOD’S CHAMPION WILL DESTROY EVIL

- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Finally, we must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God's champion will destroy evil.
 - In verse 15 we see that there will be one battle that will end the war.
 - READ 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.***
 - Notice very carefully we have almost imperceptibly shifted from talking about the many descendants of the woman to just one descendant. Notice the singular pronoun, "he." What we thought was going to be a war between two offsprings now turns into something very different. Note three things with me.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** First, God announces that a man will arise in history to fight a decisive battle with the serpent himself.
 - Notice it is a "he." This man is part of Eve's offspring. This man is going to fight the Satan himself.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** We see also that this man will fight on behalf of his people as their champion. Just as the serpent represents his offspring this man will represent all of his offspring in the war against the serpent. It is like in the first scene in the movie *Troy* when King Agamemnon and his army stand ready to fight the king of Thessaly and his army.
 - As the two kings talk King Agamemnon says, ***"I don't want to watch another massacre. Let's settle this in the old manner. Your best fighter against my best."*** The king of Thessaly asks, ***"And if my man wins?"*** True to the rules Agamemnon answers, ***"We'll leave Thessaly for good."***
 - The king of Thessaly calls forward his champion - a giant man named Boagrius. King Agamemnon calls his champion - famous warrior Achilles. In one brilliant move Achilles kills Boagrius and the king of Thessaly hands the rule of Thessaly over to Agamemnon.
 - The great champions of the two respective groups will settle the outcome of the battle: the serpent will do battle with the man.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** Finally we see that God's champion will strike a decisive blow of defeat to the serpent but will himself be greatly harmed in the battle.
 - Look at verse 15. ***"He [God's champion] shall bruise your head."*** To strike or bruise the head of a serpent is to kill it. But notice also that God's champion will also be greatly wounded in the battle. The serpent will bruise his heel.
- Now listen to Martin Luther: **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** ***"God never told the devil who 'He' would be. The devil lived in dread of every woman's son who was a believer....because he never knew who 'He' might be."***
 - Adam clearly believed God's promise for look at verse 20: ***The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.*** Adam has no children yet and God is about to tell him that he will die. But Adam believes God's promise that Eve will have children and one of these will male children will grow up to be God's champion against evil.

- God gradually reveals that this man will come through the nation of Israel and then through the line of King David. For this reason Satan tries to destroy Israel and specifically the line of David. If no son is born then no battle can take place and the serpent wins.
- It all comes to a dramatic climax when Jesus is born. The angels identify Jesus as God's Messiah – God's chosen one. ***"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."***
 - The serpent acts swiftly. He incites King Herod to kill every baby boy under the age of two within the entire vicinity of Bethlehem but God warns Joseph to flee and Jesus is saved. Throughout Jesus' life the serpent attacks him over and over again.
- Finally we read in Luke 22:3, ***"Then Satan entered Judas...And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."***
 - Jesus is betrayed and then violently killed by crucifixion. Satan has won. He has crushed Jesus' head. God's champion is dead and his body lies in a tomb.
 - But Satan did not see what was really happening. Jesus was defeating evil through evil's own weapons. On the cross Jesus was taking the punishment of our sins upon himself so that we could be free of Satan's accusations. Death is evil's ultimate weapon. How shocking it must have been for the devil when three days later Jesus suddenly sat up in the tomb. Jesus has defeated death itself. Satan has been stripped of all his weapons.
- I wonder if it was like in *The Lord of the Rings* when the Dark Lord Sauron is about to defeat all the armies of Middle Earth. He does not know that a weak little hobbit named Frodo has taken the Ring of Power, the very source of Sauron's strength, into the heart of his own realm. At the moment when the Ring is about to be destroyed in Sauron's own volcano we read the following:
 - ***(SHOW SLIDE 9) "The Dark Lord was suddenly aware of [Frodo], and his Eye piercing all shadows looked across the plain to the door that he had made; and the magnitude of his own folly was revealed to him in a blinding flash...then his wrath blazed in consuming flame, but his fear rose like vast black smoke to choke him. For he knew his deadly peril and the thread upon which his doom now hung."***³
- The serpent did not even see his defeat coming. Jesus entered right into his realm of sin and death. Satan foolishly believed he had won. Death swallowed Jesus but on the third day Jesus exploded death from the inside as he rose from the dead. In that moment the folly of Satan's actions were revealed.
 - Jesus had dealt with sin. Jesus defeated death by dying. He was wounded but he was not ultimately killed.
- So why then is there still evil today? Just as there is a period of time between the passing of a death sentence and the execution of a criminal, so we now await the devil's final execution.

³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins e-books, 2009), Kindle Edition, Location 18889.

- And God promises that day is coming when Jesus will return. On that day Revelation 20 says, ***“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur...[He] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”***
 - God’s champion will utterly destroy evil. And then we read that he is going to totally depollute this world of evil and turn this earth into a new and better Eden. Revelation 21 says, ***“[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”***
- Do you feel overwhelmed by the evil of this world? Do you get discouraged by how little your heart loves God or how quickly you fall into sin? Then look to this passage for hope.
 - At the very beginning, before all the wars, before women were oppressed by men, before violence filled the earth, before marriages fell apart, God spoke a promise of hope – a promise to depollute the world of evil.
 - This promise was fulfilled in Jesus and will one day be totally fulfilled in Jesus. This is why Paul seeks to fill the Roman Christians with hope when he writes, ***“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”*** We must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God’s champion will destroy evil.

A CHRISTIAN ON THE VERGE OF EXECUTION

- I want read a letter that demonstrates the power of hope in evil days. It was written by a young soldier about to die. During World War II he was captured and imprisoned by the Nazis and was sentenced to be executed. He is nobody you have heard of but his name is Herman. Writing from his prison in Hamburg on the day of his execution, this is what he said to his parents:
 - ***When this letter comes to your hands I shall no longer be among the living. The thing that has occupied our thoughts constantly for many months, never leaving them free, is now about to happen. If you ask me what state I am in I can only answer: I am, first, in a joyous mood and, second, filled with a great anticipation. As regards the first feeling, today means the end of all suffering and all earthly sorrow for me. ‘God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ What consolation, what marvelous strength emanates from faith in Christ who has preceded us in death. Everything that till now I have done, struggled for, and accomplished, has at bottom been directed to this one goal, whose barrier I shall penetrate today. ‘Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him.’ For me, believing will become seeing; hope will become possession, and I shall forever share in Him who is love. Should I not, then, be filled with anticipation? What is it all going to be like? The things that up to this time I have been permitted to preach about, I shall now see. There will be no more secrets nor tormenting puzzles. Today is the great day on which I return to the home of my Father. How***

*could I fail to be excited and full of anticipation? Then I shall see once more all those who have been near and dear to me here on earth. And so, until we meet again above, in the presence of the Father of light. Your joyful, Herman.*⁴

- This is the hope of Christianity. When it goes down deep in you like it did in this man, it saves you from despair. More than that this hope fills you with strength during the worst of days.
 - For if Jesus has defeated Satan, if your sins can no longer condemn you, and if death can no longer kill you, then how can you be discouraged? If you are going to enter a new world where there is no evil and you will dwell with God forever, how can you despair?
 - We must not lose hope in a world filled with evil because God will overcome evil.

⁴ <http://www.raystedman.org/thematic-studies/christmas-and-easter/the-death-of-death> (accessed March 18, 2015)