

Reading: Genesis 3:17-24

Theme: Secure Through Grace and Mercy.

Due to their sin and rebellion Adam and Eve's time in the Garden of Eden was about to end. Their lives and the world around them changed forever at the moment of their disobedience. Now, even as those who had faith in God's promise; had a wonderful provision by God to cover their nakedness, yet they were going to experience the outworking of the consequences of their sin and its sentences. In v22-24 God is seen as sovereign. All that goes on is part of His sovereign rule - even in a fallen, corrupt and sin infected world. I want us to note 3 things from the last 3 verses of Genesis 3:

1. The Misplaced Position.

Adam and Eve had been condemned and had sentences passed upon them, but they were not only what they should not be - as they should have been sinless; but they were now also in the wrong place, for they were in Paradise, in Eden, in that wonderful place God had made specifically for sinless Adam and Eve to dwell in. Yet now Adam and Eve were sinners, were in Paradise and were still in direct communion with God.

They were not just in a geographically misplaced position, but we see the seriousness of the misplaced position in God's words in v22. Here God said "*The man has now become like one of us...*" What does God mean by this? Martin Luther, John Calvin, Matthew Henry and others feel God is speaking with irony - as though man could become like Himself! Others feel God is saying man no longer views himself as a creature who should obey, but as an independent autonomous creature. Others say it means man has become as a responsible creature - like God and the angels, or man has become like the attendants in heaven and man can approach God in heaven. I thought and prayed about

these things; none of those arguments really grabbed me. I've always understood it to mean that man had become godlike in knowing good and evil. This was the basis of the tempter's temptation and the opportunity to be like God was held out to Eve and she desired it!

When God says "us", He is referring to God Himself and that like Him, man knows good and evil. The plural is used here like the plural used in 1:26 to show that in the Speaker there is a plurality of persons. Here the wonder and mystery of the Trinity is hinted at as Adam and Eve were made in the image of God (1:26a), but had now come to know good and evil. Because of that, they could no longer remain in the Garden for they were in the wrong place, a misplaced position.

Man possessed the knowledge of good and evil, but it perverted him. He is biased, leans toward, is inclined toward, magnetically, gravitationally attracted to evil and sin and most often he will hate the good. Good and evil are known from the standpoint and the experience of a sinner. Yes they had become godlike, but in a perverted, topsy-turvy way. God is good, holy and pure and He cannot stand evil and hates sin. Adam and Eve are now sinners, are fallen creatures, slaves and in bondage to sin. Man's nature had become intrinsically evil and would hate good and God. Man knowing good and evil is the reason for their ejection from Eden and we see:

2. The Merciful Ejection.

What we read here of God ejecting, expelling and putting man out of the Garden of Eden is not to be seen as an act of cruelty, but an act of grace and mercy. God had given Adam and Eve the best of everything; He had warned them not to take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they had. In doing so they

had sinned, were under God's sentence and had forfeited their rule of Creation. They did not yet realised their wills were captive to sin, to the devil, inclined to sin and their own hearts were corrupt.

Now there was a danger that they could eat of the tree of life and live forever. As a mercy, as a kindness, God was not going to let that happen! Hold on a minute; you may be thinking "*What is this tree of life which is mentioned here in chapter 3 for the first time?*" Yet is not mentioned for the first time in the Bible - for in 2:9 we read of it and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were both there in the Garden. We are not to have the idea that they were "magic" trees, or were in some way able to confer to the eater of the fruit its powerful characteristics.

They were real trees, but with no intrinsic power in and of themselves. They were, as one writer says, **sacramental** - they were the symbol of the reality behind them. In 2:9 the tree of life is mentioned first and it was also in the midst of the Garden and this symbolises the life which comes from God - showing that man's life and worship are to be God centred. God was initially in the centre of Adam and Eve's lives. The chief end of man was and is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever - both on earth and then most wonderfully in heaven. Adam and Eve had the privilege of enjoying and glorifying God in Paradise. Yet they were on probation in Eden and if they passed that probation they would be granted to partake of the tree of life.

In 2:9 the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is mentioned almost in passing, but in 2:17 our and Adam's attention is focused on it. Here is the arena of testing and if there was a successful passing of the probation period in resisting and refusing to eat of this tree, they would then be entitled to eat of

the tree of life. Sadly they failed and were not entitled to or allowed to eat of the tree of life. The eternal life, the fixed state of mankind for eternity was signified, symbolised by the tree of life. Adam and Eve had no right now to partake of it. If they had eaten, they would have taken something, stolen, something that was not theirs by right and it would not have been the eternal life God had designed for mankind.

God is in control here, not as a cruel, angry God, but One who was pleased by Adam and Eve's faith. He had provided a covering for them and here He is acting in mercy. Just consider that if Adam and Eve had eaten of the tree of life, then they would have been brought into a state of everlasting living. That may not sound so bad to many! The fact that there would be no death would mean it was a state of no deliverance - as it was fixed. It would have been to live forever in a state of sin with all its horrors, with no escape and no end from the Stalin's, the Pol Pott's, Hitler's and there would be no end to misery, sickness, sorrow and pain. This was not God's purpose, plan and way for eternal life for which man was designed - as God wanted eternal life to be enjoyed and delighted in by them.

For God to drive mankind from the Garden and away from the tree of life is up there as one of the kindest and most merciful things He has ever done in a long list of kind and merciful deeds. Imagine a toddler in the family and they want to play with the shiny thing that they can see glinting in the sun when you're out on a walk and they lunge forward to get it. Yet you shout and grasp their tiny hand only millimetres away from a discarded drug addict's needle - are you cruel or kind? Good or bad? Severe or merciful?

A far worse fate was avoided by God being merciful and ejecting Adam and Eve out of the Garden. To live for ever in a state of sin would have been a curse and no blessing. God in His love, mercy and greater plan of salvation has to eject mankind from the Garden, but it is a merciful ejection. God was in control there and He acted sovereignly, forcibly, but mercifully to put Adam and Eve out of the Garden. Be sure Adam and Eve did not want to go and leave Eden, even as they were banished, sent (v23), for in v24 we see that they had to be driven out as it appears they were unwilling to leave, unwilling to obey God and in trying to remain they were claiming that they knew better than He did! We may question God when He lets things happen in our lives that we do not like, fear or want, but Father does know best!

Can we blame them? Eden was Paradise on earth - beautiful, a delight and had God's presence. Sadly mankind had spurned all this, had rejected God and His command and wanted their own way. Even now in the light of sin and its sentence, they would not listen and obey God, but needed to be driven from the Garden. This ejection was a punishment inflicted for mankind's good and benefit. Even though it exposed them to temporal death; it was designed to keep them from an eternal life of sin. Mankind could remain no longer in Eden and there was this merciful ejection. If it was us, we'd want to get back in? I feel Adam and Eve did and so we see:

3. The Mighty Security.

Adam had been warned that if he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then he would surely die - in dying he would die. Death in the Bible is always thought of in terms of separation. **Physical death** is the separation of soul, spirit from the body; **spiritual death** is separation of soul from the life of God and **eternal death** is separation of soul (*and eventually*

body) in hell. When Adam sinned he had spiritual death - his relationship with God was broken and he was spiritually dead. The death sentence of physical death was in place and although they were justified and reconciled by faith they could not remain in Paradise and in this uninterrupted communion, oneness with God in which they had been formally. Sin was active in them and would be present as a dominating principle in their lives and in the lives of all their children and descendants - except One, the One who was born as the Seed of the woman only!

Sadly Adam and Eve would have tried, attempted to get back into paradise their own way. People still try and get into heaven under their own steam, by what they do, achieve, feel and reason. They cannot see, do not realise that their best is not good enough. For anyone to get into heaven means they and we have to get past not St Peter, but God and His holiness and justice.

Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden and the way back in was securely barred. There were cherubim put in place as security guards and these are mighty angels. We are told of seraphim, cherubim, archangels, mighty angels and the Angel of the Lord in the Bible and so we have some glimpse of the angelic realm. We have a description of cherubim in Ezekiel 1 and they are spoken of a number of times in OT especially on the curtains of the holy of holies in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Cherubim are living creatures, they are obedient to God, they are responsible creatures and will obey God whatever He says and their task here was to wield the flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

It is likely that these were visible to Adam and Eve, maybe even to their immediate descendants. We are not told when the Garden of Eden was removed from earth and these cherubim were

removed off the earth also. Some commentators think it might possibly have been at the time of the flood, but this is speculation!

What we are to realise is that these ones not only guarded the way, but also symbolically declared that for any man or woman to get eternal life they would have to go past the Mighty Security of God's instigating. If anyone wants to go to heaven they have to get past not just cherubim with a flashing flaming sword, but they have to realise that the sword is God's holy justice and our lives, both our secret and public lives, have to be subjected to that!

We are told in the Bible that nothing that has sin or defiles can enter into heaven. The way into heaven is mighty secure, a high security entrance and no one can go there unless they are as holy and as perfect as God is! That means no one can in and of themselves go there, but the gospel declares that when we trust the Lord Jesus all our sin and shortcomings are removed off us and placed on Him and all His righteousness, perfection and holiness is given to us, imputed to us and we can safely go into heaven.

Older writers would write of the sword of God's holy justice and picture it being raised and used to strike God the Son as He hung on the cross, the tree of Calvary and it was not put away until all the punishment of all the sin of God's people was taken by Him and God's holy justice was satisfied. Then and only then could God's holy love and peace be extended, offered and shown to people like you and me.

In a sense the cross is the tree of life for us and as we partake of it and all that was accomplished there; we live - we have new life

and eternal life given us. Yet when we turn over to Revelation we learn of those who washed their robes i.e. believed in the Lord Jesus and have the right to the tree of life (Revelation 22:14) and earlier in that chapter there is a glorious description of the fruitfulness of the tree of life and of no want at any time (22:2). There in heaven there will be eternal life as God intends it - at His right hand are pleasures for evermore - there be no more pain, sorrow, disease or death; no sin or sinful inclinations and all things will be made new. What Adam lost we will gain more besides and it will be securely kept for us forever.

In this chapter we have seen Paradise lost, but also the hope of Paradise gained and won. We are not to forget that we, like all people, are sinners and doomed and it is only by believing in the Lord Jesus are we saved, we are being saved and we shall be saved. We are now possessors of eternal life and while we can know something of His joy and wonder here on earth, one day we will know its fullness and all its wonder.

Genesis 3 has shown us how and why this world is in the state that it is in. Thankfully God did not stop there and even before the Fall, He had the plan of salvation in place and He set His love on people before time began. His people are all whosoever will believe on Him and for them and them alone heaven is prepared and promised. That includes us if we are believers and I pray that we would all delightfully anticipate the day and time when we will see our Saviour with our own eyes and praise Him as we've never praised Him before with joy and thankfulness.