

June 9, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Jesus Reversed the Curse

They had no needles. No thread. The vines they grappled with didn't work. The leaves kept ripping. Their hands were trembling and their hearts were racing. They were hiding in the shadows of a bush. They were scrambling for their lives, but knew they were doomed. They had eaten of the forbidden fruit. The Lord told them that when they ate of it, they would die. When they engaged in a conversation with the devil, who took over the body of a snake, they were quickly tricked. They believed the snake instead of God. They became unbelievers and ate the forbidden fruit, boldly defying God. Now they were cursed.

The Bible could have ended here in Genesis 3. It could have said that God created a perfect world with perfect people, that they rejected him and so he rejected them and sent them to hell. The end. But that's not what happened. We see God's love woven throughout this historic and riveting story. Adam and Eve hid like a 3-year-old hiding behind his bedroom door when he broke the living room lamp. Of course, dad found him. Likewise, God knew where Adam and Eve were. Adam went stiff with fear when the Lord called out (:9), **"Where are you?"** In love, God was drawing Adam out and – for his own good – leading him to admit his sin. Instead, Adam answered with a lame excuse (:10), **"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."**

How silly. God was the one who made Adam. He knew what he looked like without any clothes. Now that Adam and Eve were sinful, though, they were ashamed of their naked bodies because they kept having dirty thoughts. The Lord ignored Adam's lame excuse and led him to confess his sin. He spoon-fed him his confession. (:11), **"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"** All Adam had to say was, "Yes." But he still made excuses. When God first gave Adam his wife, Adam was overwhelmed with thankfulness and joy. Now he threw her under the bus and blamed her for giving him the fruit. She must have been furious with him. Adam also blamed God for giving him a wife who would mislead him. God ignored Adam's implied insult because he finally led Adam to admit (:12), **"I ate it."**

Then God dealt with Eve. Again, notice the Lord's love in leading Eve to admit her guilt. When God asked her what she did, she took her cue from Adam and tried to dodge the truth as she blamed the snake for tempting her. In the end, though, she also admitted (:13), **"I ate."**

Sin ruined everything in the world. Satan got what he wanted. Adam and Eve's relationship with God was shattered. The devil did his worst. He managed to get Adam and Eve to question the tenderness of God's love and the truthfulness of his word. Adam and Eve belonged to God, but the devil got them to turn away from God and follow him. They earned God's curse and now the whole world suffers as storms, earthquakes, volcanoes and other natural disasters make life miserable for millions. Our lives are all filled with difficulties – health problems, financial fears, frustration, exhaustion, depression, loneliness, fear of the future. People all over the world suffer. Our world is cursed. It seems like the devil won.

Just like Adam and Eve, we regularly sin and try to explain it with silly excuses. Genesis 3 is your story as well. You are the man. You are the woman. God gave you his law spelled out clearly in the Ten Commandments. You sinned. You earned God's curse. Through his word, God lovingly leads you to see your sin. You instinctively ignore your guilt by blaming others. "I would have a better attitude if I did not have to put up with my wife or husband. I would be a better person if my parents raised me better. I would not be so cranky if I was not under such pressure. I would have more patience if the children behaved better, It's the economy. It's my job. My co-workers. My neighbor." and on and on. There is never an excuse for disobeying God. There is never an excuse for sin.

You know many, many people, of course, who live with guilt and it doesn't seem to bother them. They are living in a state of denial. They listen to all the excuses that our sinful world suggests. "It's my life and I can do what I want with it." "You can follow the Bible if you want, but it's not for me." "I can do whatever makes me happy." "Don't judge me because you're not perfect either." "I haven't done anything really bad, like murder." "No one got hurt." And on and on. The Lord wants to lead them to recognize and admit their sins, but when God calls out to them, "Where are you?" they close their ears. They try to ignore the fact that they will eventually die and one day have to stand in front of God just like Adam and Eve did. But then it will be too late. How sad.

So, where is your heart? Do you hear the Lord calling out, “Where are you?” Are you trying to hide behind excuses as flimsy as leaves? Are you blaming someone else for your sins? Are you rationalizing your guilt by pointing to others or your set of circumstances in life? Are you standing before the Lord trying to hide your guilt? May the Holy Spirit lead us to stand before the Lord and admit, “I sinned. No excuses. I am guilty. I deserve to be punished here and eternally. I deserve to be cursed.”

Adam and Eve were guilty as sin. They knew nothing of forgiveness yet. They expected eternal separation from God in hell. After addressing Adam, then Eve, the Lord turned his attention to the devil, the serpent. There is no love woven into this message. He said to the serpent (:14), **“Cursed are you!”** Adam and Eve’s jaws must have dropped open. They deserved to be cursed, but the Lord cursed Satan. Then God explained to Satan (:15), **“I will put enmity [hatred] between you and the woman.”** You see, when Eve listened to the devil, she became his friend, an unbeliever. The devil thought he had Eve in hell for all eternity. Instead, the Lord was going to bring her to faith and save her. She was going to hate the devil for what he did to her. The Lord continued explaining the curse to the devil, **“and [there will be enmity, hatred] between your offspring and hers.”** From that time forward, there would be a conflict between those who follow the devil and those who believe like Eve. Unbelievers who ridicule us and an increasingly immoral society continue to make life difficult for us. The fact that there would be a struggle meant that the devil would not control everyone. The Lord continued with the knock out punch. He said to the devil, **“he [a specific descendant of Eve whom we know as Jesus] will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** This happened when Jesus was on the cross. His heel was struck. It hurt. But through his death on the cross, Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world. Sin is what the devil was going to use to drag everyone into hell. When Jesus took away the sin of the wicked and wrecked world, though, he took away Satan’s power to drag you to hell. It was like crushing a snake’s head. If you look at the world around us, it might seem that Satan won. In reality, on a cross outside Jerusalem, Jesus won.

All the righteous anger and heartbroken fury that God had for Adam and Eve’s sin and the sin of the whole world, including yours and mine, was vented on Jesus as he hung on the cross. You and your sin were punished in the person of Jesus Christ, who came into this world to be your substitute. He took the blame and the shame that we deserved. Hiding in a tree, the devil plunged the world into sin and death. Hanging on a tree, Jesus rescued the world from sin and death. Adam and Eve tried to cover their

nakedness to hide from God. Jesus’ body was exposed to God as he hung on the cross. Jesus became your substitute, and because he was already punished, God is not going to punish you. Your sins are forgiven. The perfection of the Garden of Eden that was lost because of sin will be restored in the perfect peace and beauty of heaven for those who are connected to Christ. Adam and Eve brought a curse into the world, but Jesus reversed the curse. When Adam and Eve heard God’s promise to send a Savior who would crush the devil so they could go to heaven instead of hell, their hearts must have leapt for joy and thanksgiving. Instead of facing God’s anger, they were now embraced by God’s love.

A little girl once came home from Sunday School and told her daddy that she learned to play rock / paper / scissors in class. Dad was curious. She asked him to play a game of rock / paper / scissors. He agreed. They pounded their fists three times and the dad gave the sign for scissors while his daughter simply shouted, “Jesus.” Then she explained, “Jesus always wins,” as she laughed and skipped away. The Sunday School lesson was that Jesus always wins.

As we go through life, there are many times that we do more than pound our fist into our palm a few times. There are times when we seemingly bang our heads against the wall. There is frustration and fear with the way things are going in our world, let alone our life. Will Ukraine and Russia lead us into World War III. What about Israel and Hamas? How can we afford things with inflation out of control? Why do my children keep making such miserable mistakes? How will my grandchildren turn out? Will I ever find true contentment? Will I ever stop hurting after the way I was neglected and mistreated and abused? Etc. No matter what you are pounding your fist about, you can laugh and rejoice to know that Jesus wins. He crushed the devil’s power to drag you into hell. Jesus always wins. He won your heart and he will share the eternal victory celebration of heaven with you. Jesus won the victory not by pounding his fist into his hand, but by having nails pounded through his hands.

When the devil tripped up Adam and Eve, they put themselves and the whole world under a curse. In love God led Adam and Eve to admit their sin and then announced to them a Savior from sin. The Savior’s name is Jesus. Jesus reversed the curse and you are saved. Amen.