

WHEN GOD'S LOVE IS DOUBTED

Genesis 3:1-24
Key Verse: 3:15

Lesson 4a

God made a good world. He made man to be happy and provided everything necessary for his happiness. But the world in which we now live doesn't seem to be good. It is full of sorrow, tragedy and violence. Happiness is like a rainbow which we can never seem to catch. How could the good world created by a loving God get this way? And is there any hope for men in a world like this? In Genesis 3 we study the first great turning point in human history--the fall of man. Man's sin transformed God's good and beautiful and happy world into a cursed world, groaning in travail, waiting for its redemption. Instead of living as rulers and stewards of God's world, men became servants of the devil.

1. The fall of man (1-13)

In this chapter Satan personified in the form of the serpent (Rev 12:9) makes his appearance. The writer of Genesis does not tell us about his origin. He does tell us that he was crafty and that he was a created being. The implication of other scripture (Rev 12:7-9; Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4) is that Satan was a beautiful and powerful angel who forgot his position, rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. Pride destroyed even angels of God. John 8:44 tells us that he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

His purpose in tempting the woman is clear. He wanted her to listen to and follow his words instead of obeying God's word. This seems like a small thing. But until this time, mankind had obeyed God and walked with him in beautiful fellowship in the garden. The Bible says that we are slaves of the one whom we obey (Rom 6:16). By disobeying God and obeying Satan, mankind would come under Satan's authority. They would be transferred from God's kingdom to the kingdom of Satan. Creation order in the garden was kept by man's obedience to God.

How did Satan lead the woman to disobey God? First, he asked a question about God's command: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden.'" He tried to confuse her about God's word, and he suggested that God's prohibition was unreasonable, and that furthermore, it impinged on her rights. He listened to her answer, then said, "You will not surely die; God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." There is enough truth in his words to make it the most effective kind of lie. (22) When he said, "You will not surely die," he was removing the absoluteness from God's word. He was saying that obeying God's word is not really a life and death matter. Then he suggested that God's motive in forbidding them to eat of one tree was not love but tyranny, and that God was withholding from them something very good. He led her to doubt the goodness of God. When doubt of God's love took root in her heart, and when the fear and respect of God and his word was shaken, she could entertain the possibility of disobedience. She became vulnerable to temptation.

What was it in her attitude toward God's word and blessings that weakened her? In the first place, she was not grateful to God for his gracious and abundant provision for her needs and happiness. The good and delightful trees of the garden were all prepared by God. He had commanded man to eat freely of their fruit. But the woman took this gift and blessing for granted. (vs.2) At the same time, she put unnecessary emphasis on the negative part of God's command. (God did not say "Don't touch it"; he said, "Don't eat it.") She did not pay careful attention to God's word, or hide God's word in her heart. Instead, she accepted Satan's words. He had told her that eating the fruit would make her as wise as God, and she believed him. He didn't tell her the tragic consequences of disobedience. Her physical desires, which were intended to enrich her life became unrestrained. The fruit was beautiful and looked delicious.

It became very desirable. So, without any further thought, she took it and ate. Her act was an act of obedience to Satan and an act of disobedience to God. She moved from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of Satan. Guilt longs for company, so she gave some of the forbidden fruit to Adam; he ate and joined her in the kingdom of Satan. Their innocence was gone. They tried to cover themselves to hide from each other. They tried to hide from God. The beautiful relationships with God and with one another were broken. Adam blamed the woman for giving him the forbidden fruit, and he blamed God for giving him the woman. Fear, guilt and broken relationships are the gifts of Satan. Lost innocence can never be recovered. When God called, "Adam, where are you?" Adam couldn't answer. He was lost.

2. A world under curse (14-19)

God cursed the serpent. But embedded in his curse is a precious promise that plants hope in the hearts of all men. God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." In God's right time Jesus, the seed of the woman, would come to crush the head of Satan. He would be painfully wounded by Satan, but he would win the victory. This is good news. Satan will be defeated; he will not always rule the world. This is the promise of God that plants hope in men's hearts. This promise is fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection. (Heb 2:14,15; Ro 16:20)

This one act of disobedience seems very small, but it was an act of rebellion against God. Because mankind joined the rebellion of Satan, God put the world under curse. The writer of Romans says that God subjected creation to frustration (or futility) in hope that it would be liberated some day. (8:20-21) So we are living in a world under curse.

The specific punishment given the woman was directed toward the special blessing God had given her. God had blessed mankind and told them to be fruitful and increase in number. But in a world under curse, childbearing became the woman's cross of pain. Joyful friendship with her husband, and the joy of sharing with him in doing God's work was replaced with selfish desire for him. The order of love in the family was replaced by man's tyrannical rule over woman, rule enforced by her fear and desire. This curse can only be removed by Jesus. He came to set mankind free from the curse. He died so that we might be set free from slavery to sinful desires and the guilt of sin. He came to restore our relationship with God and to make it possible for men and women to have a healthy and

right relationship with one another. He came to restore love and friendship in the home.

Man's punishment was also directed toward his blessing. God made the man fully responsible for listening to his wife instead of obeying God's word. Man was created to be the steward of God's world. He had tilled the ground to fulfill his mission and serve God, and he had named the animals to joyfully co-work with God. His work was joyful and full of meaning. But now, because of his sin, the ground and all creation were under curse. He lost his mission; he must work, not for God but for his own survival. Work became toil; the final enemy, death, awaited them both. Only Jesus can remove the curse and restore man's mission. He died and rose to give life and meaning and mission back to mankind.

3. Banished from Eden (20-24)

God still loves fallen man. He covered their shame and guilt with durable clothes made from animal skins. Animals were killed for the sake of man. In verse 22, God said "man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." This was not a blessing, as the Temptor had suggested; it was a curse, because the knowledge of good and evil came through doing evil, and brought tragic consequences, which the Temptor had not bothered to mention. The knowledge of good and evil can also come through resisting evil and doing what is good. This takes a little longer, but this knowledge builds man's character.

God expelled them from the garden. To allow mankind to eat of the fruit of life and live forever in his sinful state would be to sentence them to hell immediately. Although God expelled them from the garden, he did not destroy the tree of life. The tree of life is still there, waiting for redeemed mankind to come and eat.

The consequences of sin is death. Man cut off from God by sin is like a cut flower. He is already dead. He is dead spiritually. (Eph 2:1) Only physical death and hell waits for him. So man's life becomes a pilgrimage back to the tree of life. He can eat the fruit from the tree of life when his sins are washed in the blood of Jesus (Rev 22:14); the tree of life is in heaven--in the New Jerusalem. Although we live in a cursed world, by God's grace we can live with a glorious hope. God's unchanging love and his wonderful promises give us hope.