

Introduction

This morning marks the beginning of a new series that we're calling "Christmas Hope." Last week Brian reminded us that the birth of Ruth & Boaz's son brought hope to the family of Elimelech. And then he said, "The son born in this story points to God's Son born at Christmas. He is God's ultimate provision, the redeemer of our lives, and our sure, and grounded hope for our future." The hope that comes with Christmas is available to everyone, but it often gets squeezed out, minimized, or buried beneath the avalanche of boxes, ribbons, wrapping, food, travel & shopping.

Every year Christmas seems to come around more and more quickly. Try as we might to slow things down, it seems that we turn around and it's here again...(it doesn't help that stores are putting out Christmas stuff in August!). If we're not careful, we find ourselves almost half-heartedly giving into it and getting into it with just enough enthusiasm so as not to be labeled "Grinchy" or "Scroogy."

Sometimes I wonder if the sparkle of Christmas has faded because we've lost touch with the core of Christmas. It's easy to get distracted by the all the packaging and lights if we don't fully embrace and enjoy the soul gripping and heart satisfying hope that's found in Christmas. Going through the motions just won't do.

[Illustration] It's like the gag gift that's beautifully wrapped, in the biggest box under the tree. Sure, it *looks* good, but when you unwrap it, the box is mostly packing peanuts, crumpled paper, a few bricks to give it some heft and a gift that looks an awful lot like a lump of coal. It looks good but it doesn't really deliver.

Over the years, our Christmas series have focused on slowing down and being intentional with our time, energy and attention so that we don't miss the personal significance of Christmas. We've revisited some of the traditions of Christmas and the joys of being home for Christmas so that we can be refreshed in their meaning and more fully engage. This year, the series is going to be a little different. This series will take us back to the basics of Christmas. It will help us get past the bows and decorations. It will take us beyond our cultural traditions to the foundational, biblical *hope* of Christmas.

It may not sound like a heart-warming series of messages. But, if you will track with us for the next several Sundays, I think your heart will be refreshed and your Christmas spirit renewed with substance and rich, full meaning. **I think this series will revive your excitement for the biblical significance and the Divine joy of the season.** That's the stuff that grips the soul and engages the heart. And if you have trouble *getting into* Christmas because the hectic pace or relentless commercialism have made you lose heart and filled you with cynicism, then this series is for you.

Despite the emotions that might get stirred up in you during the Holidays, the *Bible tells us that* Christmas is a season that is all about hope. And we're going to show you what that means throughout the series. This first message is titled **Hope Promised**. And today we're going all the way back to Genesis to take a look at the fundamental need for Christmas.

Did you ever wonder 'why Christmas' or what the 'point of Christmas' really was? The text we're going to look at today is not in the typical line-up of Christmas passages, but it's where the *purpose* of Christmas starts. Understanding Genesis 3 is essential for a full and rich appreciation of Christmas. Because before you can really enter into the joy of Christmas with heart and soul, you have to have a clear understanding of the *why* of Christmas.

Understanding Our Problem

Look at Genesis 3: 1-6 with me. To understand the *why* of Christmas you have to understand the main problem with humanity...with you, me and everyone else. [READ]

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Up to this point, God had blessed Adam and Eve with many good and beautiful things. They lived in complete and perfect intimacy with God, and in complete and perfect intimacy with each other. They knew only personal wholeness and relational satisfaction and fulfillment. Imagine a relationship with God, your spouse, your family and your friends that doesn't have any sin-pollution: no self-centeredness. Try to imagine that.

Now, into that incredible environment, a problem arises. The problem is introduced by Satan, God's chief enemy. Notice in verse 1 that the enemy tempts Adam and Eve to sin by challenging [challenged] God's goodness and questioning [questioned] His Word (3:1). 'Did God *really* say...?'

The Bible says that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's will for them, they brought disobedience, sin, into the human experience. Most of us are well aware of that. Most of us recognize that in our hearts, there lives

a proneness to do life how we want to do it...not how God wants us to do it.

As we read this story today, once again we see, with shocking clarity, how Satan leads Eve to question God's goodness and the validity of His Word. The enemy still uses those tactics to trip us up. His deceptive methods haven't changed a bit.

Questioning God's goodness and questioning the validity His Word are often at the core of the enemy's attacks on us. And we have to be wise to that and counter that attack on our faith by calling out to God in prayer, asking Him to fill us with His power and wisdom. We have to call on Him to bring clarity to our thinking and reassurance to our faith. Then we rely on His power and wisdom to make right choices...choices that align with His desires, His will and His word. We have to decide to 'resist' the enemy and when we resist the devil, the Bible tells us that "he will flee from us." He will come back and try again later but the promise is there. If we resist, he flees. If we yield to him, he wins (James 4:7).

Now, in verses 2-5, *Satan follows up his questions with a lie that is disguised as a promise.* He promises them that they would actually be like God if they disobeyed Him. The truth is they were **more** like God *before* sin entered their lives, and became **less** like Him *after* their sin (3:2-5). Delivering lies disguised as promises is one of the enemy's favorite tactics. Think about it...

Sin always looks so good before we jump into it...it holds so much promise. But it always makes us worse off. It always promises something good, but never delivers. It always promises freedom, but only delivers bondage. It always promises joy but delivers only pain and heartache.

Think about your own life. Sin basically boils down to this: question God's good intent, question His Word, fall for a lie disguised as a promise and end up regretting it. I mean, think about the junk you've been through: didn't it basically follow that path? Question God's goodness, question

the truth of His Word, fall for a lie disguised as a promise that will meet your need and regret the consequences. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin became part of the human experience.

The Consequences of Our Problem

[**Transition**] Let's take a look at the consequences. Check out v 7-13

[READ]

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.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The most obvious consequence of their sin is estrangement. There is a distancing from God and there is a distancing from each other. Sin disrupted divine-human fellowship and human relationships. Their innocence was replaced by an awareness of good and evil. It introduced shame and guilt which drove a wedge between them and God, and it introduced awkwardness and embarrassment into their relationship with each another.

John Piper said, "When sin entered the world, it ruined the harmony of marriage NOT because it brought headship and submission into existence, but because it twisted man's humble, loving headship into hostile domination in some men and lazy indifference in others. And it twisted woman's intelligent, willing submission into manipulative {compliance} in some women and brazen insubordination in others. Sin didn't create headship and submission; it ruined them and distorted them and made them ugly and destructive."¹ Sin messed up our relationships.

Verse 16 tells us that Another consequence is pain. Read verse 16. To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

What was once a privilege had been corrupted by the fall. Perfection was replaced with pain. What once was a beautiful, complementary, relationship has turned into marital strife.

Verses 17-19 tell us that sin didn't just bring pain for the woman; it brings pain for the man as well. Read verses 17-19.

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

It's not only pain in procreation, but it's discord in marriage, frustration and toil in work. It's no surprise that Satan still strikes at all these areas.

The Promise of Hope

¹ John Piper, "Husbands Who Love Like Christ and the Wives Who Submit to Them," sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church (6-11-98); submitted by Aaron Goerner, Utica, New York

Now in the middle of these verses, where God is detailing the consequences of their disobedience and rebellion against His perfect desire and will, He whispers a word of hope about the solution to their sin and its consequences. That hope-filled solution is so subtle you can easily read right over it. Look at verse 15.

And 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." [Your Bible may say, Bruise your head...bruise his heel. Strike your head...strike his heel. It's the same verb: to bruise, to strike, to crush, to grind or to pound.]²

Ironically, the hope-filled solution to their sin problem was whispered in God's curse-word to Satan. God did not come to them to obliterate them. His wrath did not instantly consume them. And it's interesting that God's solution wasn't, "Eve, here's what you need to do." Instead, in His indescribable grace and mercy, God takes the initiative. To Satan God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers [notice he doesn't say 'their offspring']; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Don't miss it: *even before God pronounces a penalty for sin upon humanity*, The mercy of God speaks a curse upon the tempter which becomes a promise of hope for the tempted! Before He pronounces judgment, He displays mercy. The rest of the Bible makes it clear: the merciful solution would be God's Champion, who would come into the world and win the battle over Satan. The "he" of this curse-word to Satan, is the divine offspring of Mary, the Son of God, the Messiah named Jesus. The One who came at Christmas. He will bring final a final death blow to Satan, and He will bring healing for the wounds inflicted on humanity's heel.

² *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. The term "bruise" can mean "crush," "pound," "rub off," "grind," or "strike" (BDB 1003, KB 1446).

1 John 3:8 says, *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."*

Romans 16:20, *"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."*

Revelation 12:9, *"This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels."* [NLT]

Paul connects all the dots on this in Romans 5:15-19, "For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous." Romans 5:15-19 (NLT)

[Illustration: The Passion of the Christ]

Many of you have seen the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which powerfully depicts the final twelve hours of Jesus' life on the day He was crucified. I want to share a few screen shots from the movie that capture the hope that God promised in Genesis 3.

Shortly before He was arrested in the garden, Jesus was intensely praying, calling out to the Father in deep anguish because He knew what was coming. In the movie, while Jesus is praying, the serpent—the tempter, the deceiver—shows up to try to exploit Christ in His agony and

distress. Then Jesus stands up and looks down at the serpent. And in a moment, which was both startling and celebrational, *watch closely*, He smashes the serpent under His foot.

That bit of movie magic demonstrated precisely what God meant when He cursed the enemy, '*He (Jesus) will crush your head.*' The work that Jesus accomplished would ultimately destroy the enemy and his sinful plans for humanity.

Conclusion

The reason Jesus came into the world is because of the mercy of God in response to our sin. The mercy of God speaks a curse upon the tempter which becomes a promise of hope for the tempted! This promise gives us hope for healing, for peace, for reconciliation, for safety and a hope for complete and total restoration of our lives. The next few weeks leading up to Christmas we are going to discover even more about the hope of Christmas. The truth is, it's impossible to fully comprehend the breadth and depth of Christmas without understanding that *Jesus* is the hope that's promised in Genesis 3.

Invitation

In this story about humanity's sin, I want to make sure you notice God's immediate response. Look again at verses 8-9. They sinned. And God came searching for them in their hiding. God came calling for them in their shame and guilt. And He is doing the same for you today.

Some of you have already come out of hiding and embraced His love and forgiveness by trusting Jesus as your covering for sin and your promised hope for eternity.

But maybe you are here today, and you didn't realize that God really loves you and is actually pursuing you and offering the solution for your sin. You've been 'hiding' from God just like Adam and Eve, not realizing that God wants to connect with you to forgive you and whisper a promise of hope to you. You don't need to hide anymore. If that's you, I want to

encourage you to call out to Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, your Leader and Forgiver.

You could say something like this. There's no magic in the words on the screen, but if they reflect your heart, then make this your prayer: Jesus, thank You for being the solution to my sin problem. I don't want to hide from You anymore. I need You to forgive my sin and fill me with Your Spirit so that I can live for You, rather than living for the enemy. I give myself completely to You today and want to follow Your lead for the rest of my life.

If that's your heart's desire, if that's your prayer today, raise your hand and make sure I see you. I want to pray for you as you begin your new life as a follower of Jesus. And I want to pray that you would grasp the richness, the 'wow,' of Christmas this year!

Close

Friends, we have hope because the promise God made all the way back in the Garden was delivered in the Christ who came at Christmas. This hope is for you, it's for your neighbor, it's for your spouse, your family and that difficult person you sit next to at work or school. That promised hope is for everyone, and Christmas is a wide-open opportunity to make that Hope known.