

## Long road out of Eden – Genesis 3:20-24

19<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at 6.30pm

### Introduction

Good evening everyone

In Genesis 1 we read six times that God looked on what he had made and it was good

Does this match with your experience of life?

That it's good? Does it?

In a 'good' world, why is everything and everyone overshadowed by death? ..... Just this week, we had yet another TV programme on euthanasia

In a 'good' world, why do we have the knowledge and technology available for the elimination of hunger in the world... but not the political will or personal motivation to do so? ..... Just look at the current issue of Christian Aid news: *"Hungry for justice – We can feed the world, so why are nearly one billion people still starving?"*

In a 'good' world, how have we developed a standard of living which allows us to concentrate on the quality of personal relationships – in a way earlier generations couldn't – and yet find it so difficult to make lasting personal commitments? ..... On this Father's Day, just think of the number of failed marriages and absent fathers that there are

Why, if what God created was good, is there so much ugliness and evil in the world? Why?

Modern secular culture has no answer to this apparent contradiction, but that faithful repository of Godly wisdom, the Bible, certainly does

In fact one of the reasons that Genesis 3 was written is because it's absolutely critical in helping us make sense of what we see and experience in this broken world

It also gives us enormous hope – enormous hope that there is a solution – that there is a way back to Eden for all of us

So, would you please turn to Genesis 3:20-24, and we'll have a look together at three key ideas that come out of this important passage:

Firstly, the reach; secondly, the cover; and thirdly, the sword

Got that? The reach, the cover, the sword

Let's see what they teach us about the human condition and where our hope comes from

### The reach (v22)

Okay, firstly, the reach:

<sup>22</sup> *And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever."*

Just as the serpent had promised back in verse 5, Adam and Eve have indeed become *"like God, knowing good and evil"*.

But even though true, it's a sadly ironic statement:

The serpent had implied that being like God would bring unlimited privileges and good things

But instead of finding bliss, they find only misery

Instead of sitting on a throne, they're expelled from the garden

Instead of new opportunities, they experience only reversal

You see there are two ways to get to know good and evil, just as there are two ways to get to know about an illness such as AIDS:

One way is to get to know it so that you know how to treat it, and how to avoid it. The other way is to catch it!

They're both forms of knowing the illness, but which would you rather have?

So verse 22 is sadly ironic because Adam and Eve wanted to know about good and evil..... and what they wanted they got!

But it's not a dream it's a nightmare.

They find out that knowing about evil at first hand isn't all it's made out to be!

So God, in his mercy, says that they mustn't be allowed to *"reach out"* and take *"from the tree of life"*.

Why? Why did God say this? And why was he being merciful?

Let's first think about what the tree of life is supposed to be about.

It's supposed to be about eternal life. But we need to understand what is meant by eternal life – because it's easy to miss it

Because it's not meant to be primarily about eternity – life that simply goes on and on and on. No. It's meant to be much much more than that.

Eternal life is not so much meant to be about quantity of life as quality of life.

Not so much duration as fullness of life.

You may remember Jesus saying in John 10:10 that he had come that we might *"have life and have it to the full"*

The tree of life is intended to be about life in all its fullness, about life in all its magnificence, about life in all its glory. Something that's infinitely worth having

So, if it's something that's infinitely worth having, what's God saying when he says that they mustn't be allowed to 'reach out' for it?

Well the reason is this: They mustn't be allowed to 'reach out' because they've lost God

If you want to be your own god with a little 'g', you're going to lose God with a capital G.

You can't have it both ways: either you're your own little god – or he's your God.

The problem is that if we were to grasp eternal life in our current, broken, state, we would have to live life forever without God.

We would have to face eternity without him; an eternity of knowing evil, pain and suffering; an eternity without the prospect of hope

The eternity we would be reaching out for would be the mirror image of life in all its fullness

The mirror image of what God intended for us

The mirror image of life together with God in the garden

And God, in his mercy says, no, I won't allow that – I'm not going to let my people suffer like that

I won't let my people 'reach out' for the tree of life – because there is another, better, way.

### **The cover (v21)**

So, we were stopped from 'reaching out'. Now let's have a look at the idea of 'covering':

<sup>21</sup> *The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*

What's the significance of this?

Well, it's clear evidence that God hasn't given up on Adam and Eve. His love for them is undiminished. Despite their deliberate disobedience, he continues to love and look after them with a passion.

The first thing that he does, after the judgement, is to graciously provide them with more effective clothing than fig leaves.

But what's going on here? What lies behind this nakedness that has to be dealt with?

One of the side-effects of the Fall, one of the impacts of sin, is that as humans we can't bear to be out of control about what other people know about us.

We can't bear to be in a situation where we can't filter it, where we can't explain it, where we can't control it

We can't bear this because we can't bear the idea of people knowing our flaws, our failings, our imperfections

Imagine going into a room full of people wearing clothes and you are naked.

How do you feel? Naked! That's the point!

Others can see what I'm like but I can't see what they're like.

It makes us feel less than human

In other words, nakedness is a sense that there's something wrong with me, and I can't keep the eyes of other people out.

The problem is that we all have this deep sense of inadequacy that we're desperately trying to keep hidden from other people

The sin that we've inherited from our relationship to Adam means that every single one of us is born with a deep sense of condemnation.

In fact to some extent we can understand much of our life as doing two things:  
Firstly, we're trying to uncover other people – to expose them and to get power over them – because we know that they're not what they seem to be  
Secondly, we're trying to cover ourselves up. We're trying to prevent others from having that same power over us

Because if other people actually saw us for who we really are  
If they even saw the thoughts that we had, that we have  
If other people really saw how foolish we are, how petty we are, how scared we are, how obsessed about things we are, how insecure we are  
Then we would be simply devastated

All of us have this fear of other people seeing us for who we really are and so we're desperate to cover ourselves

It's so stupid! In verse 10 Adam says "*I was afraid because I was naked*". But he was naked in chapter 2 and he wasn't afraid!  
So it's not transparency as such that's the problem – it's that deep sense of condemnation about ourselves that's the problem

Does all this make sense to you?  
Because until you understand this properly you're not going to change your life [pause]

Okay, let's have some examples of how this works

Why is it that so many people overwork? Why do people say, "I'm just going to work really hard until I get there, or achieve that"..... and then they get there and carry on anyway!  
Could that be you?

Or why is it that so many people find it so difficult to say no to people? Why is it that it's so difficult to see that look of disappointment on someone else's face? And so people work themselves into the ground, trying to do anything to make sure that no one's unhappy with them  
Could that be you?

Or why is it so difficult to stand up for someone who's being teased?

Or why is it that some people are incredible religious – needing to condemn everyone, or perhaps anxiously running around doing lots of religious practices

Do you see that these are all just fig leaves?  
Do you see that your need to overwork is a fig leaf?  
That your perfectionism is a fig leaf?  
That your need to be popular among your friends is a fig leaf  
That your need for approval is a fig leaf?

Do you see that?

Do you see that you're trying to cover over that sense of inadequacy?  
Do you see that you're trying to get control – desperately trying to get control of your nakedness?  
And meanwhile you're trying to uncover everyone else

Of course the problem is that fig leaves don't work!  
They fall apart. They're draughty! They don't fit! They don't cover you!

So, here's the challenge: what can we do about this? How can we prevent our whole lives from being dictated to by our fear of inadequacy?

And the answer is: nothing – because there's nothing we can do to put this right

But fortunately for us someone else can! Someone else has  
Fortunately for us someone else has done something that changes everything  
And that's where the idea of the sword comes in

### **The sword (vv23-24)**

So we've looked at the ideas of reaching and covering, and we've seen the desperate situation that humanity was left in following the Fall.

Now let's look at the sword:

<sup>23</sup> *So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.*

<sup>24</sup> *After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

Now there are two things that we need to know at this stage: one is obvious, one isn't

First of all, sin always excludes. Sin always isolates

I mean this is just common sense isn't it?

The essence of sin is self-centredness – a focus on our self

So, go into any situation with people: a family, a marriage, a gathering of people  
Go into any community – any community at all – and always put yourself first  
And it won't be long before you'll be alone

In most cases you won't get cast out – the garden just ups and leaves you!  
Sin always excludes

But notice that what keeps Adam and Eve out of the garden, out of the glory, out of what we were designed for, is not a door or a wall or a hedge, but a sword.  
And here's the important thing to realise, a sword in the Bible always represents the justice of God.

So what keeps us out of Eden is the need for justice. There's a debt to be paid

The Old Testament makes it clear that the only way that we'll ever get back to the garden is if justice is satisfied.

The sword says: "I'm a just God and there's a debt to be paid. If you want to get back in, you're going to have to go under the knife"

So what's the hope? Here's the hope: Jesus

Jesus was cast out. He said "my God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus was stripped naked – the soldiers cast lots for his clothes

Jesus went under the knife – he went under the thorns, the nails, the spear

We can have confidence in the blood of Jesus, because the sword fell on him

And that's why God covered Adam and Eve

And it's why he'll cover us..... if we let him

If we let him. This is a really important point to grasp. The order of events here is vital:

We have to uncover to him first, before God will cover us

We have to admit to him our faults and our failings

We have to bare our ourselves and our souls

We have to admit our inadequacies

We have to admit that we've been trying to use all those fig leaves to cover our weaknesses

And that it's been a massive failure

We have first to uncover our need of him..... And then he will do what he's been longing to do all our lives – he covers us

Now remember this is quite subtle

Remember that it's quite easy to let good things as well as bad things become fig leaves.

This may seem strange – but it's true!

For example it's possible for things like coming to church, going to a home group, helping others, which are all good things – it's quite possible to let these to become yet more fig leaves to cover up our nakedness

Because it's possible to do these things thinking that they will, in some way, make us look good in God's sight.

But they won't

Only one thing will do that – the blood of Jesus

So I want to give you a couple of ideas, to help you know for certain that it's God doing the covering not you.

Firstly, if you're letting God do the covering, you'll begin to notice that you're finding it easier to let people see you as you really are.

You'll find it easier to admit when you're wrong.

You'll find it easier to not to spin things to make it look as though you're better than you are

You'll find it easier and easier to repent – saying sorry, if still not fun, will become cool and refreshing

Secondly, if you're letting God do the covering, you'll stop being the sort of person who needs to put other people in their place  
You'll stop being the sort of person who puts others down; the sort of person who's always complaining about others and has to win every argument

You see you don't need to do these things if you know the covering love of the Lord Jesus Christ

### **Conclusion**

We've talked about three ideas that come out of our passage this evening: reaching, covering, and the sword.

And I want to ask you this: Where is your hope tonight? Is it in those mouldering, festering, fig leaves of yours – or is it in the covering love of Jesus Christ?

One of my favourite bands of all time is the Eagles. I bought my first Eagles record over 30 years ago, when I'd just started going out with Fiona.  
A couple of years ago, I bought their latest record.  
It's brilliant. And it's called "*Long road out of Eden*"

Here's some of the lyrics for the title track:

*We're riding to Utopia; road map says we'll be arriving soon  
Captains of the Old Order clinging to the reins  
Assuring us these aches inside are only growing pains  
But it's a long road out of Eden*

*Back home I was so certain  
The path was very clear  
But now I have to wonder: what are we doing here?*

.....

*Behold the bitten apple – the power of the tools  
But all the knowledge in the world is of no use to fools  
And it's a long road out of Eden*

The Bible says that God cast us out of Eden, for our own good – to stop us reaching out for what wasn't ours

But the Bible also says if you want to get back to Eden, it doesn't have to be a long road  
That there's a way past that sword thanks to the blood of Jesus

But you have to take off your fig leaves first

If you want to get back to the place you were designed to be, you have to take off your fig leaves before God will cover you with the covering love of Jesus

Are you still walking that long road out of Eden?  
Or have you discovered the short way back yet?

## Prayer