Praise God who is all good and loves us.

*The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

 Hebrews 7:23-25

All direct male-line descendants of Aaron would be priests in God’s temple. We can see that as generations went by, there would be large numbers of men who would be priests with the responsibility of ministering in the temple. (Incidentally, John the Baptist would have been a priest were it not for the special ministry God called him to.) At any point in time, there would have only been one high priest, but many would have been designated priest simply by being in Aaron’s line.

As the Scripture in Hebrews points out, there were lots and lots of priests. And the main job of the priests was actually to intercede for the people. They were the ones who were between God and the people, the mediators, because the people were separated from God by their sin. Even the priests had to offer sacrifice for themselves before they could come before God on behalf of the people.

The sacrifices and intercession offered by the priests were less than perfect: the animal sacrifices could only cover the sins of the people, not remove their guilt; and the priests who offered the sacrifices were less than perfect themselves, so, they tainted their own offerings. Additionally, they died and other men had to take their place as priest.

All of these efforts pointed to God’s actual solution: Jesus Christ. Jesus was not in the line of Aaron, but God appointed Him priest, in fact, high priest. He Himself was perfect and He offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Also, even though He died, He rose again and now continues to live forever. His sacrifice permanently atones for all our sin, so that we are no longer separated from God and can come before Him in prayer. Even still, Jesus continues to intercede for us in God’s presence.

Jesus is our great High Priest now and forever, and His perfect atonement saves us forever.

In Christ’s love

John

 2-20-22

Genesis 3:1-24 (3)

We are considering the fall of mankind; the point in history where our first parents rebelled against their creator God. In an act of disobedience against the command of Yahweh, Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This act brought sin and death into the world. It made it so that the evil that accompanied satan would now reign in the hearts of men.

We’ve considered the part satan played in all this and looked at some of his tactics that he still uses today. As Jesus later made clear; satan is a liar and a murderer. His fate is sealed by Jesus’ work on the cross, but he is still very active and dangerous. Adam and Eve bear equal guilt in their disobedience to God, but Adam has the greater responsibility. He shirked his responsibility as head of the family, did not intervene when satan tempted Eve, and partook of the fruit that was forbidden by God.

The beginning of verse 7 tells us what happened as soon as Adam ate. “*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked.*” One thing to notice here is that they did not suddenly drop dead. God had specifically told Adam back in 2:17, “*in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.*”

We need to look at this. First, let’s consider what happens at death. When we die, it is because our physical body stops functioning; but when that takes place, our spirit leaves us. In other words, there is a separation between our body and spirit; and we call that death. Our spirit is the part of us that communes with God. When we sin, that communion is broken; our spirit is separated from God. So what happened was a spiritual death. It took place immediately. The death of their bodies came later, but at that moment their spirit was separated from God.

This is why Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. He did not mean a physical rebirth, but a spiritual rebirth. When we accept Jesus as our Saviour, communion is reestablished between our spirit and God; our spirit is alive again.

Once Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their eyes were opened. That doesn’t mean that they were blind before; it means that they became aware. They became aware that they were physically exposed. Even though this is our natural state, the way God made us, sin has marred God’s good creation and we feel the need to be covered. Throughout the Bible, nakedness is associated with shame and sin. Even today, most people don’t want to be naked in public. Having said that, we can also see the effects of sin with the increased level of nudity in movies and in the use of pornography.

But in addition to physical nakedness, Adam and Eve’s defiled conscience was laid bare. Each one was guilty and the other one knew it. Again, most people today don’t want others to know when they have done wrong. However, we also see today a push to accept evil openly. The Bible told us this would happen.

It’s important to see that there is a change in the relationship between the man and the women. Before, “*the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed*.” Now, they were ashamed in each other’s presence. A self-consciousness had begun in the marriage relationship that had not been there before; and we all know that it continues to this day. They had to partially hide themselves from each other. And ultimately, they tried to hide from God.

Verse 7 tells us they tried to fix their immediate problem: “*they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings*.” Somehow, they put together fig leaves in a pathetic attempt to cover themselves. We have images in our minds due to all the artist’s renderings of Adam and Eve in the garden and they always seem to make it look reasonable. But it’s not; picture trying to hook leaves together in some way to make a reliable covering for yourself.

But while this is historical fact, what we have is a graphic picture of mankind trying to deal with his own sin problem. Our natural inclination is to cover up our sin in some way. We try to hide it, or we try to justify it, or we try to do several good things to make up for the wrong. No matter what we do, our attempt to cover our sin is just as pathetic as the attempt to make leafy loincloths.

We need to jump ahead for a moment to verse 21. We’ll look at this verse in more detail later but for now we notice it says, “*The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife.*” Our merciful God didn’t just let them continue to run around wearing leaves. He made proper clothing for them.

But what is really happening here? Man’s attempt to cover himself was a failure; God had to do it. And so it is with sin. Mankind could do nothing to cover his sin so that he would be acceptable before God. God had to make a way and His way was with the atoning sacrifice. This was the first of many animal sacrifices that would come about in God’s Law. In the Old Testament Law, the innocent animal was sacrificed to cover the sin of the people.

That word “cover” is important. The animal sacrifices covered the sins of the people but they did not remove the guilt. In the same way God made a proper covering of clothing for Adam and Eve, He made a proper way to cover their sin so they could be in His presence. Of course, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ was required to not simply cover the sin, but to remove all the guilt and provide spiritual rebirth.

Back to verse 8. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden. The Bible doesn’t tell us if they heard footsteps or the sound of branches rustling or what they heard. But they knew that God was coming to see them. Surely at earlier times, they would have gladly come to Yahweh to spend time with Him. But look what sin did: now they hid from Him; they hid among the trees of the garden.

Now, we know that this was even more foolish than the leaf clothing. There is no way to hide from God. God is omnipresent and omnipotent; there is nothing that is unknown to Him. Yet this is the natural reaction for someone who is spiritually dead, which at this point, Adam and Eve were. That is why so many attempt to hide from God today. They are spiritually dead and want nothing to do with Him.

Hiding from God takes many forms; from thinking He won’t know something we did, to outright denying He exists. To think God won’t know something is a misunderstanding of how powerful God is. It is thinking that in some way He is like any other human-being. It is putting Him in the same category as all the mythical gods who could be fooled or manipulated. Part of our job as Christians, is to revere God at all times so others can get an idea of who God really is.

There are also many who simply deny He exists. This has become more popular in recent decades. It has become popular for many young people to claim to be agnostic or atheist. They will claim that there is no evidence for God. Any of us who are Christian understand that there is plenty of evidence in creation and also from the longing in our hearts that can only be filled with God through Jesus Christ.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, these people are choosing to disbelieve in God so they can do what they want to do. If there is no God, then there are no moral obligations, and no punishment for immorality. The obvious flaw here is that simply claiming disbelief doesn’t make something untrue. God does exist, there are moral obligations, and there is punishment for immorality. The Christian must live a moral life and then be ready to explain why when someone asks. Testify that God is real by the way you live. This is the ‘actions speak louder than words’ proverb. Then be ready to testify by word when asked why you live the way you do.

*[T]he Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?*” As we talked about earlier, God knew exactly where the man and woman were, He knew what had happened, He knew what they had done. The man and woman had done the opposite of what they should have done; they ran from God instead of running to Him and confessing. (A reminder for us!) God called to them to give them a chance to come to Him and confess.

It is important in this verse to see that God called to the man; He addressed Adam. This is how God had set things up. The man was to be the head of the family and responsible for it. As we will see later, the sin of Adam and Eve set in motion the constant contention of this order that God had established.

Adam responded to God’s calling, “*I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself*.” It is probably significant that Adam used the pronoun “I” four times in this sentence along with “myself”. Yes, God had spoken directly to him, but when Adam was wed to Eve, the two became one flesh. Adam’s statement is very self-centered; as if he is far more worried about himself than his wife. Again, this same self-centeredness plagues marriage today in both sexes.

It is truly sad to see here that Adam and Eve are not only estranged from each other, but they are estranged from God. The relationship between husband and wife is changed for the worse for as long as the earth shall last; and the free relationship between people and God has changed, also for the worse. We must praise God for His great mercy and love that He didn’t leave things this way. In Jesus, our good relationship with Him can be reestablished. The strain of life here on earth becomes the time of shaping us into the spiritual stones that God intends for us to be in His temple.

God fires off two more questions: “*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*” Here again God is not asking questions because He doesn’t already know the answer. None of this surprised God; He knew it would take place before He began creation. Here was another chance for Adam to confess. This is a display of God’s mercy. The Bible tells us that God is absolutely just; His very nature demands justice. He will not allow any sin to go unpunished. It would have been perfectly within God’s justice to have annihilated Adam and Eve right then. But because He is also merciful, He restrained His justice.

God displayed His mercy by giving them a chance. He gave them a chance to confess and to repent of their sin. In so doing, they would display their faith in God. It is faith that saves. Even with this mercy and salvation, God’s justice still needs to be satisfied. I will explain in a later sermon why I believe Adam and Eve were saved and are in heaven. If this is the case; God’s justice was satisfied in Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus paid the price for this original sin that Adam and Eve committed, and any other sins of theirs. If they did not have saving faith in God, they are paying that price now.

Adam’s response to God’s questions is, “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate*.” Here is the beginning of blaming others for what we have done. It is now natural in us to blame others for our own actions. The interesting thing is that it makes perfect sense to us when we do it. It our minds, it is the other persons fault that we did something wrong. This is part of the fallen nature of mankind.

His answer is scary in its attempt to relieve himself of the guilt. He certainly blames Eve, it’s her fault; but he also blames God: *The woman whom You gave*. The Bible tells us that we are at enmity with God, and here is the first demonstration. Also, here is more evidence of the problems that men and women, husbands and wives, have with each other to this day.

Adam has shirked his responsibility right here before God, so God turns to Eve. “*What is this you have done?*” Eve is experiencing powerful emotions she has never dealt with before. Guilt, for one; but also fear. Here she stands before all powerful God, with His full attention focused on her, demanding an account; while her husband, who is supposed to be protecting her, is pointing his finger at her instead.

She does what is now natural for them both: she blames someone else. “*The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*”

It is painful to read this account and see the seeds of so much that is wrong in the world now. But it is a good demonstration of just how heinous sin is. It’s effects multiply quickly and infect everyone. It is something that is beyond the power of human-beings to stop. Fortunately, it is not beyond the power of our all-good God, and sin’s days are numbered.

Prayer

Lord God, how terrible it is that mankind rebelled against its Creator. It has affected all human relationships; between ourselves and with You. Even with all the evil we see, we can’t comprehend how much damage evil has caused; we can’t imagine the depths of its perversity. Help us Lord, to be as offended at evil as You are; to hate sin as You do.

How awesome is the God of the Bible, who is able to defeat all the forces of wrong. It is a great cosmic battle; yet the outcome is already determined, the outcome was never in doubt. You, Lord God, can smite evil at any time; yet in Your mercy, You also offer salvation for mankind. All these things You have accomplished in Jesus Christ; just part of Your plan to bring all things together in Him.

We are Your people; You call us to be holy priests in Your service. In Christ, we overcome all obstacles to our communion with You. This is all by Your hand, by Your might; and may it be for Your glory. Thank You for the covering of the righteousness of Jesus. In Him, may we serve You in accordance with Your perfect will.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen