



## Salvation through Judgment

### Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #8

Genesis 3:8-24

David Sunday

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Let's pray together.

Lord, you have heard our prayer. In answering that prayer, show us Christ. You give us everything we need. We pray that You would reveal Your glory through the preaching of Your Word. Let us see Jesus more clearly. We ask this in His name. Amen.

Last week, we were in Genesis 3:1-7, and we saw this wonderful, idyllic, beautiful world of Eden, where, at the end of chapter two, the man and his wife were both naked and unashamed. We saw how all of that was ruined in six short verses. Humanity believed the lie of the serpent that God does not have our best interests at heart and is withholding something from us, and that we will not be held accountable for our disobedience to Him. Because of that lie, that section in verse seven ended with shame. Now, we see the consequences of that sin, as we read 3:8-24. They are consequences that affect every single one of us, for we are in Adam, and we are all corrupted by his sin.

Genesis 3:8-24 says:

<sup>8</sup> *And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*  
<sup>9</sup> *But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"* <sup>10</sup> *And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."* <sup>11</sup> *He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"* <sup>12</sup> *The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."* <sup>13</sup> *Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

<sup>14</sup> *The Lord God said to the serpent,*

*“Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.*

*<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.”*

*<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,  
“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.  
Your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.”*

*<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said,  
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”*

*<sup>20</sup> The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the  
mother of all living. <sup>21</sup> And the Lord God made for Adam and for his  
wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

*<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one  
of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand  
and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”<sup>23</sup>  
therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to  
work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the  
man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim  
and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the  
tree of life.*

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God!

Ray Pritchard has written, “There are so many problems with fig leaves. They fall apart easily. They itch. It’s hard to find the right size. And every day or two, you have to get a new

outfit. Plus, you can't do much plowing or planting or serious cooking if you're wearing fig leaves."

I wonder what you wore to church this morning. I'm not asking if you wore a jacket or tie or decided to dress casually. I'm asking you if you came to church in fig leaves. Fig leaves represent man's attempt to cover our shame by our own actions. When they sinned, Adam and his wife had their eyes opened. Verse seven says, *"Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths."*

We might be more sophisticated than that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but we still have our puny attempts to cover our sin and shame. It may come through religion, hard work, money, self-status or a veneer of good works to try to cover the guilt that we are very aware of within us. But all our efforts to cover our shame with the fig leaves of our own righteousness are doomed to fail just as they did in the Garden of Eden.

### **Common Characteristics of Fig Leaf Wearers**

So what are you wearing today? Did you come here in fig leaves? Let's first look at three common characteristics of fig leaf wearers. These characteristics are true of everyone who is trying to cover his or her own shame.

First, fig leaf wearers are always hiding. Verse eight says, *"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day..."* This was a very familiar sound. They would have had fellowship with the Lord, so this would have been a welcoming, joyful sound. But because sin brought shame into their lives, the man and the wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

We have this concept today that men seek after God, but it is God Who has gone offline. We are trying really hard to find Him, but God has made Himself difficult to find. Men are seeking God, but God is hiding. That is the way we tend to think, but it is actually the opposite. Human beings did not seek after God in the Garden of Eden. It was not men and women, Adam and Eve, who walked around saying, "Lord, where are You? We have failed miserably and we need You so badly."

That is not what happened. Instead, we see God's first question to humanity in verse nine. "Where are you? Where are you, Adam?" God's voice called. It was God's first question to humanity. God did not seek information. He knew where Adam and Eve were. Rather, God treated Adam and Eve as a loving parent would treat a child who has run far from home. He sought His lost children, showing how precious they are to Him. He drew them to Himself,

rather than driving them away. God did not act like an unrequited lover, saying, “You know what? If you reject Me like that, I’m done with you.” No, His voice of kindness and love cries out, “Where are you?”

Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling.

Calling, O sinner, come home! Come home!

(Softly & Tenderly by Will L. Thompson, 1880)

We don’t want a God Who seeks us when we are wearing the fig leaves of our own righteousness. I heard about a university student who said, “I like to think of God as a mystery.” Someone responded to him, “Do you want Him to stay a mystery?” The student said, “Actually, I do.” We like a God Who is elusive because then we can stay elusive. We like a God Whom we say we are agnostic about because then we can stay at a distance, hiding. That is the first characteristic of fig leaf wearers. Are you hiding from God? Are you even using religion and some formalities of church-going as a means of keeping God at a comfortable, controlled distance?

The second characteristic of fig leaf wearers is fear. We see this in verses 10-11. To God’s question, Adam responded, “*I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.*” Fear after sin can be a very good thing. We sing “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear.”

There is an old hymn written by Francis Scott Key, the man who wrote the National Anthem, that says, “Praise the grace whose threats alarmed me, roused me from my fatal ease.” It’s a good thing to be roused from the fatal ease of satisfaction with our own selves. Remember “Amazing Grace” goes on to say, “And grace my fears relieved.” When we cower in fear and hide at a distance from God, it is a sign that we are trying to cover our sin and shame through the fig leaves of our own righteousness.

The third characteristic is blame shifting. Verse 11 continues, “[*God*] said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’”

What a quick and abrupt end to the honeymoon! How far we have fallen, from “*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man*” to “God, You can send her to hell, not me; she deserves to die, not me; it’s not my fault.”

At first, Adam implicitly blamed God. He said, “*The woman whom you gave to be with me...*” It’s as if he said, “God, I was happy with all those animals. I didn’t need her in my life. It was good for me to be alone.” He blamed God, and He blamed the woman.

Sin is like that. It not only separates us from God, but also from one another. Fig leaf wearers are always detecting the sins in others and are always able to confess others' sins, but there is a strange inability and blindness toward seeing the sins in ourselves. We do not own it or take responsibility.

Likewise, the woman shifted the blame in verse 13: "*Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'*" Thus, the old joke says, "Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the snake. And the snake didn't have a leg to stand on."

What is missing in all of this? Personal responsibility. There is no true acceptance of fault. "It's somebody else's fault for letting this happen." Fig leaves that we use today sound strangely familiar:

- "I was having a bad day."
- "It was my upbringing. Have you any idea the pressure I am under?"
- "It's my environment."
- "I don't have enough money."
- "It's my wife."
- "It's my hormones."

It is a denial of the *imago dei*. To be created in the image of God means that, among all the creatures, we are uniquely endowed with freedom, accountability and responsibility before our Creator. When we are wearing the fig leaves of our own righteousness, covering our own shame, we always deny responsibility. We downplay the seriousness of sin. We imagine ourselves better than others. We think our sin is small enough that fig leaves can cover it, but it is never that small.

Will Willimon, an evangelical Methodist bishop, write something that is kind of insulting, shocking and bracing about how we religious believers often think about our sin? If you find it revolting, it is probably because it strikes so close to the heart. Listen to how he phrases the prayer of a religious believer who thinks of sin lightly:

Really now, Lord Jesus, is our sin so serious as to necessitate the sort of ugly drama we are forced to behold [on Good Friday]? Why should the noon sky turn toward midnight and the earth heave and the heavens be rent for our mere peccadilloes?

To be sure, we've made our mistakes. Things didn't turn out as we intended. There were unforeseen complications, factors beyond our control. But we meant well. We didn't intend for anyone to get hurt. We're only human; is that so wrong?

Really now, Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, we may not be the very best people who ever lived, but surely we are not the worst. Others have committed more serious wrong. Ought we to be held responsible for the ignorance of our grandparents? They, like we, were doing the best they could, within the parameters of their time and place. We've always been forced to work with limited information. There's always been a huge gap between our intentions and our results.

Please, Lord Jesus, die for someone else, someone whose sin is more spectacular, more deserving of such supreme sacrifice. We don't want the responsibility. Really, Lord, is our unrighteousness so very serious? Are we such sinners that You should need to die for us?

Really, if you look at the larger picture, our sin, at least my sin, is so inconsequential. You are making too big a deal out of such meager rebellion. We don't want Your blood on our hands.

We don't want our lives in any way to bear the burden of Your death. Really. Amen.

Fig leaves. Fig leaves cover those who think their sin is small. God is seeking His children who are covered in fig leaves. God is saying, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Come out from your hiding place, from your self-reproach, your covering, your secrecy, your self-torment, your vain remorse. Come home. Come home." We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

### **Instructions on How to Go Forward**

Ray Pritchard says that the first law of spiritual progress is that we have to come to terms with these three things:

1. I can't go back.
2. I can't stay here.
3. I must go forward.

We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but we can't go back. We can't undo it. And we can't stay here with Adam and Eve, covered in these flimsy fig leaves as if this is not a big deal. We must go forward. But how do we go forward once we have failed? We have all fallen in Adam. Adam's story is our story. We are united to him in his death and in his sin. How do we move forward? Move it down to the existential level in your life: how do you move forward after you have failed miserably? You see you are guilty, vile, helpless and sinful, realizing, "These fig leaves can't cover this shame." How do you go forward?

Let me give you two instructions from this text. First, recognize sin's destructiveness is greater than you can repair. Recognize the gravity of your sin and the scope of its destructiveness. Come to terms with the fact that nothing you do can cover or repair this.

Anselm asked, "Have you not yet considered what a grievous weight sin is?" That is what verses 14-19 are designed to help us do. They help us consider what a grievous weight sin is. As we read these curses and the devastating results of the Fall, God is declaring, "This is how seriously I take sin. This is how I will respond to the rebellion in the garden." God responded as if this was a monstrous situation.

He responded first to the serpent in verses 14-15. The serpent was condemned. God did not ask him any questions, such as, "Where are you? What have you done?" He just said, "*Because you have done this, cursed are you...*"

This was not up for negotiation. There was no mercy. This was the most cursed animal. He was condemned to crawl on his belly and eat dust all the days of his life. This was not a story about snakes and why human beings should hate snakes, although I think they should. Even Indiana Jones hated snakes, so real men should hate snakes. But if you like them, it's probably okay. The serpent represents the devil, who afflicted Job, crippled a woman for 18 years, and who tempted our Lord Jesus in the wilderness. He wages war against Christians in Egypt and cuts their heads off. That's whom this curse is against.

Because we have believed his lie, we are now faced with a lifetime of enmity and warfare against an "ancient foe who seeks to work us woe." He is slithering and vicious, but, praise God, his doom is sure. Thank the Lord!

One commentator says, "In a kind of poetic justice, having triumphed over humanity, he will be beaten by humanity." God says in verse 15 that there is coming an offspring from this woman who shall bruise his head, but it's not going to be without much pain and conflict. There will be a terrible struggle, but, in the end, he will be crushed by the One Who disarms Satan and triumphs over them in His cross. Because of that, the Apostle Paul can say to the Christians in Rome, "*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*" (Romans 16:20).

Thanks be to God! Through judgment, God will bring salvation. Have you considered, though, what a grievous weight sin is?

In verse 16, the wonderful words "*be fruitful and multiply*" that we heard in creation became spoiled because the woman would experience pain at childbirth. Pain is not just in bringing forth children at birth. I think it can stretch to include the whole process of raising children in a fallen world. They are such a blessing, yet that blessing mingles with such

heartache. We have such sublime joy as parents, yet it is accompanied by some of our most intense anxiety, grief and sorrow.

The woman's relationship with her husband was also spoiled. God said, "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*" (verse 16). This is not talking about natural desire or sexual desire, which are good things. In order to understand what God is saying here, we must read Genesis 4:7. The Lord approached Cain in 4:6 and said, "*Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?*" Listen to these words in verse seven: "*If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.*"

Sin desired to master Cain, but Cain was commanded to master sin. As a result of the Fall, there is now a battle between the sexes within marriage. A woman and a man fight for supremacy. The beautiful picture we have in Genesis 2 is of a male lovingly leading his family and a woman joyfully submitting in a partnership that is beautiful. Pre-Fall, this was God's design for marriage, but it became spoiled, shattered and corrupted by sin. Relationships in the home after the Fall are often marked by struggle, tyranny and domination.

Sometimes, I fear conservative churches today are eager to raise godly families, but we often act as if we have the power within ourselves to reverse the effects of the Fall through our own discipline and instruction, trying hard to instill biblical principles into our family. Sometimes, we go straight for the biblical vision of a family, but we do not go through the cross, the gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He alone can enable husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33). Because we divorce our family teachings from the gospel and from the gift of the Spirit, we often end up creating frustration, futility and despair in our homes. We are all affected by these curses. Do you see what a heavy weight sin is?

In verse 17, God held Adam accountable and responsible, saying, "*Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...*" In others words, "You have done this. You should have risen up, led, guided and protected. Now responsibility is on you. In your daily realm, there will now be sweat, toil and pain in order to eat your food. There will be futility in your work." Work is a wonderful thing that God has given. Notice all these beautiful things. Here in Genesis 3, the movie of Genesis 2 is being played in reverse as work, marriage, childbirth and life itself are now all tainted and spoiled by sin. Our lives in this fallen world are such a mixed experience!

The Book of Common Prayer says, "In the midst of life, we are in death." That affects even our best experiences. For example, you go on a vacation thinking it's going to be wonderful, and you get in a fight on day two. On day three, it's ruined. They didn't tell you in the brochure

that there was a construction project next door, and you have to listen to that all the time. By the time you get toward the end of vacation, you begin thinking about going back to work, where you have to deal with broken machinery, workplace politics, failed deliveries, boredom, missed flights, crossed wires and all kinds of futility. In the end, as verse 19 confirms, there is death.

This past Thanksgiving, Dave and Mickey DeHahn enjoyed such a wonderful time with Mickey's dad and mom. He sent pictures of his dad gathering the family for a worship service. It was a beautiful time. Yesterday, at the age of 70 and in the midst of his labors, he had a heart attack and died. This is not the way it was supposed to be. These are the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Do you see what heavy weight sin has brought upon humanity?

Here's the point of all this: sin is so far-reaching. Its destructiveness is so massive. It afflicts every aspect of our existence—the spiritual, relational and physical. We cannot go back or undo its effects. We definitely cannot stay here, trying to cover ourselves in our shame and our own fig leaves. It will not do. The wreckage of sin is too great.

What all of this says to us is that we need a great salvation, a salvation that comes through judgment. We cannot go back. We cannot stay here. We must go forward. How do you do that?

First, you recognize sin's destructiveness is greater than you can repair.

Second, you trust that God's judgment is surprisingly rich in mercy. Trust God in that.

There is an indication in verse 20 that Adam recognized mercy mingled with judgment. Adam named his wife and called her "Eve." If you have footnotes in your Bible, they will probably say, "It sounds like the Hebrew for life-giver. It resembles the word for 'living' because she was the mother of all living." It is as if Adam listened to God's judgment on sin and recognized, "We have made a mess of things. I cannot go back. I cannot fix it or cover it myself. But praise God there is mercy mingled in His judgment! He has spoken about offspring. He has talked about children being born. He has told us that one of these children is going to crush the head of the serpent, so there is going to be salvation. Therefore, you shall be called 'Eve,' for you are the mother of the living." There is mercy mingled with God's judgment.

Verse 20 shows us Adam's faith in that mercy. There is no more blame shifting, but there is hope and confidence of future blessing. We also see mercy mingled with judgment in verse 21, as the Lord made garments of skin and clothed Adam and his wife. The fig leaves would not do. A sacrifice had to be made. An animal had to be killed. Blood had to be shed for the guilt and shame of sinners so that they could be covered. God said, "You will now go out into the world covered in the skins of animals, reminding you of what a heavy weight sin is and what a gracious, merciful provision I am making to cover your sin."

There is even mercy in the banishment from the Garden of Eden. Look at this in verse 22: *“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever...’”* It was as if God said, “I cannot go on any further. We cannot even think about what would happen if man in his sinful condition were to eat of that tree and live forever in his sin. That cannot happen.”

Why can't that happen? What do we call a place where people live forever in their sin? We call that place “hell.” It would be a horrible thing to live in this fallen condition forever. So God, in His mercy, put cherubim outside the garden. Don't think of them as little chubby angels in the Precious Moments catalogues. These are fearsome, angelic agents with flaming swords that turn in every direction, guarding the Tree of Life.

Notice that God did not destroy the Tree of Life, but He prevents us from ever accessing it in our sinful condition. God is saying, “You cannot go back to Eden.” But God has prepared something better for us. He does not want us staying here hiding in our fig leaves. He is seeking us. He wants us to come home. He wants to clothe us in His righteousness, and He wants to lead us forward to a better future, a new creation.

How do we get there? We trust in the One Who came into the world to destroy the devil's work and Who let Himself be hung on the cross to bear the wrath of God against our sins. As He was hung on that cross, Matthew 27 tells us that a hand came and tore the curtain of the temple in two, from top to bottom. I don't know if it was a literal hand, but, somehow, from heaven above, the tear began. On that curtain flaming cherubim were embroidered, as if to say, “The way into the Holy of Holies has been guarded from sinful humanity.” But Jesus died and said, “It is finished.” The temple curtain was torn in two, and we now have a new and living way into the Holy of Holies that has been opened for us.

What do we find in the new creation? The Tree of Life. Turn in your Bibles to the last chapter of the Bible. Let's read the first few verses of Revelation 22. This should remind us of Eden:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

The tree is no longer guarded by flaming swords and cherubim. It is free, and its fruit is abundant for all. For all who are in Christ, there is a way forward. Outside of Christ, there is no

way back, and there is no way in. We see that in verse three: *“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”* Friends, in Christ, there is a way forward. Outside of Christ, there is no way—no way back and no way in.

Thus, we read in Revelation 22:14: *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”*

Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, I pray that by Your grace and mercy we would recognize the weightiness of sin and the mercy of Your judgment against it. May we recognize our need for a covering that we cannot provide for ourselves, and may it move us by Your Spirit to flee to Christ, in Whom there is life, healing, peace, reconciliation, freedom from fear and a home with You forever. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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