

It's Sentencing Day Genesis 3:14-20

After my Dad retired from serving at Barakel he began to work for the Oscoda County Sheriff's department, which had been doing as a volunteer. He was their chaplain, served papers on behalf of the prosecutor, did prisoner transport to other jails or for prisoners to stand trial. He was also court bailiff. He was present at many different cases when the individuals standing trial received their sentence. The most famous case involved a very heinous act of which I will spare you the details. The day after the sentencing of the two individuals, who had committed the crime, he drove them to the Federal penitentiary in Jackson where they would be remanded to serve their sentence. When he drove into the facility and transferred them to the custody of the attending officer, the officer said to them "welcome to the rest of your lives."

As we have said before it's not clear how long it was before Adam and Eve sinned by rebelling against God's command. Adam was told that if they disobeyed they would die. Let's keep in mind that all sin is serious, all sin is rebellion against God, all sin will be punished.

The Bible clearly says that everyone of us has sinned, we have all rebelled against God and that the sentence for sin that has been given to us is the same sentence issued to Adam and Eve in the garden. We are all sentenced to death. Unlike us who are born as sinners, at their creation, Adam and Eve were not sinners. They were created innocent. They were without sin until the moment they sinned and then they became sinners.

In that moment they lost their innocence and made a human and futile attempt to do something about it. They tried to cover it up with some fig leaves and then when they heard God coming, the One who had told them that if they ever disobeyed there would be serious repercussions for doing so, they tried to hide from Him.

Last week we considered how they tried to pass the buck by blaming someone else. Neither was willing to accept personal responsibility. Pastor Don used to say that your response is your responsibility. We can't blame anyone else for doing something we did that was wrong. Our undoing is our own doing.

God first approached the man. Ultimately it was his responsibility to guard the garden and protect his wife. He was the one to whom the command was given. He was to teach it to Eve. He didn't fail in that regard because she knew the command, but not well enough to defend against the deceit of the serpent. God then talked to the woman. Notice that God never gave the serpent an opportunity to talk.

As we turn to our passage in **Genesis 3:14-20** I want you to notice that as God metes out the sentence on each one for their role in the disobedience He speaks first to the serpent, then to the woman and finally to the man.

Let me underscore that in spite of the gravity of the situation in their sentencing there is grace. In the midst of their sin there is salvation. I hope you will take that to heart that God always extends grace.

I want us to see that not only for Adam and Eve but for all their posterity, (that's the rest of humanity who have been born since then) in the middle of the punishment God had a plan. It's evident in the promise He made to them and it's for us as well.

As we look at our passage let's consider the following:

A painful sentence

A promised salvation

A personal security

I. A PAINFUL SENTENCE – vs. 14-15a, 16-19

Much of America has been watching the unfolding drama of "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett, not because of cliff hanging scenes from one episode to the next, but because of the case brought against him by the Chicago Police department. He claimed

to have been the victim of a hate crime, but as more facts of the case came to light, it became evident that he was the one who had orchestrated the bizarre events to bring attention to himself. This last week in a surprising twist, State attorney Kim Foxx dismissed all 16 felony charges. People looking at the dismissal wonder if he was given special treatment and conclude that the justice system seems to be different for the average person vs. people with status and money.

In Our passage the just Judge of all the universe is about to render sentence. Now I want to point out that while everyone involved received sentence, only the serpent and the ground are cursed.

Let me say this before we move on to talk about each one individually. If a blessing means to be under God's favor, a curse means to be removed from God's favor. A curse does not mean God put a spell on the serpent or the ground. They were removed from God's favor.

First, we see the sentence on the serpent.

A. The Sentence On The Serpent – v. 14

I have a bunch of scars. Maybe you do too. They are reminders of events in life where something happened. They don't hurt now but they did at the time I got them.

I have a scar on the inside of my right arm where the corner of a car door scraped the skin open.

There is a scar on my left wrist from sliding into third base head first.

There is a scar on the side of my left hand from when I was in grade school and our dog nipped me.

There is a scar on my back from back surgery and several on my stomach from when my gall bladder was removed.

Every scar is a reminder of something painful.

For the past several weeks I have been thinking a lot about the serpent. I was feeling pretty bad for that creature. After all, it seemed to be an unwilling participant in the deception of Satan in the

temptation of the woman. I'm not sure it had a choice, so it seemed to me to be unfair that it was cursed. That being said, I still don't like them. I have a natural aversion to snakes. They're creepy. You hear those stories about snakes winding their way through your septic system and ending up in your toilet bowl. A few years ago there was the story about a lady who bought a coat at Good Will or the Salvation Army only to get it home and find that a snake decided to give birth inside the lining of the coat she had just bought. That just weirds me out even thinking about it.

But while studying this week I read something that made sense and helped me see that I really don't need to feel bad for the serpent. Henry Morris wrote something that shed some light on the matter. **“The serpent, as an animal, was cursed “above all the cattle, and above every beast of the field”, not because of direct culpability on its part, but rather as a perpetual reminder to man of the instrument of his fall and of the final destruction of Satan himself. Whatever may have been its beauty and posture before, it would henceforth glide on its belly and be an object of dread and loathing by all.”**

Essentially he is saying that first, like my scars are reminders to me, serpent would always be a reminder of man fall. Second, it would remind of Satan's pending doom.

The implication in the text is that the entire animal kingdom would be affected by the fall, but the serpent as a creature would be cursed above all the rest. The curse of the snake is consistent with the fate of other animals in Scripture used for illicit purposes. For example in **Leviticus 20:15-16** if an animal was used for immoral purposes it also was to be put to death. It's not because the animal was accountable for its actions but because it used immorally by man and woman who were made in God's image.

The serpent was cursed to slither on its belly as a sign of abject humiliation. Because it had exalted

itself God humbled it.

Not only would it crawl but it would eat dust. Now this isn't literal. The serpent doesn't have a diet of dirt. Like crawling, eating dust is synonymous with humiliation.

The repulsive nature of the snake is a perpetual reminder both of man's fall and of Satan and his doom. Revelation tells us that the old Serpent will one day be cast into the Lake of fire where it will spend eternity.

Then in one breath God moves from cursing the snake to bringing a sentence on Satan.

B. The Sentence On Satan – v. 15a

The word **“enmity”** simply means enemy. Yes, there is a natural animosity between snakes and mankind, although some have an abnormal fascination with the slimy creatures, but this is an animosity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

This is not speaking of a perpetual hatred between the snake world and the human world in which humanity would ultimately be victorious. Let me clarify something that isn't in our English translation regarding the word **“seed”** here. In the original **“seed”** is singular. Hebrew scholar Jack Collins examined its use and found that it always referred to one specific individual. The reference then is to a person who would come in the future. God is saying that this seed would triumph over the serpent. This is confirmed by Paul in **Galatians 3:16** where the seed of Abraham refers specifically to Christ, not to each generation from Abraham all the way to Christ.

Modern biblical criticism does not look at this as a Messianic prophecy but merely as an explanation for the ongoing hatred between mankind and snakes.

Satan did not know who this person would be so all

he could do throughout history was attempt to stop the seed from coming. Throughout Biblical history we see his effort to squelch the coming Messiah. In **Genesis 4** there is the death of Abel by Cain but God brought forth Seth.

In chapter 6 we find Noah the only righteous man alive and seemingly about to be swallowed up but spared by entering the Ark.

When Queen Athaliah came to the throne she sought to destroy all the king's sons, her grandsons, but Jehosheba, wife of Jehoida the High Priest, took Josiah who was an infant and hid him.

In the New Testament King Herod tried to kill Jesus after He was born by killing all baby boys in Bethlehem.

Before Jesus started His ministry, Satan attempted to stop God's plan by tempting Jesus in the wilderness.

We also read that on one occasion the Jews wanted to throw Him over a cliff to kill Him. On the cross the crowd taunted Him to prove He was God by coming down from the cross.

Satan made multiple efforts of killing Christ or any hope of Christ. There were many attempts that only bruised the heel of the Messiah, but on the cross in one fell swoop Jesus crushed the head of the serpent forever. In **I Corinthians 14:54** we read that **“Death has been swallowed up in victory”**. **Verse 57** adds that God **“gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Then in **Romans 16:20** Paul says that **“the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”** So get ready, he's going down permanently.

The sentence on Satan is that he will be defeated. Next is the sentence on the woman.

C. The Sentence On The Woman – v. 16

Generally speaking, though I am not an expert on

the subject, labor is a pain. The sentence on the woman seems to imply that had birth been experienced before the fall, it would have been without pain and would have been fast. Her sentence fell to what was uniquely hers as a woman, that of bearing children and as her role in being a helper to Adam. Pain in childbirth would be a constant reminder of the fall. Without the relief of modern medicine childbirth would be, as Kent Hughes describes it, “a bitter pill”. The idea presented by God to the woman is that there would be both physical as well as emotional pain in bearing children. The only saving grace, if it were, in childbirth for the woman is described for us in the New Testament where we read that the joy of the child’s birth overshadows the pain experienced at the time of delivery. Simply put, when that baby arrives the pain of labor it took to bring the child into this world is dulled.

Not only did her sentence encompass what was natural in mothering, it also included what was to be natural in marriage. Her desire would be toward her husband who would rule over her.

One commentator suggested that the context of bearing children implies that what she desired most in being a mother was something he could control by being able to withhold from her. She would desire him in order to bear children. I believe the better interpretation is to take it for what it says. I believe it means that there would be an ongoing struggle between the two for headship. Sin damaged the role of the man as head and the supporting role of the woman. She would try to assert rule over her husband in a sinful way and he would also have a distorted desire to rule over her. This verse is not an approval for man to be domineering in any way over his wife. It does not give him the right to be overpowering, overbearing, or overlording toward his wife. Paul writes in **Ephesians 5** that the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and adds that there is to be mutual submission between them.

Walvoord and Zuck suggest that because she manipulated her husband he would now master her. There would always be a power struggle between the two. There would always be strife. Instead of a relationship where there is mutual interdependence, there would be conflict. The NLT adds some clarity: **“You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”**

In the closing verses of God’s sentencing He focuses on Adam.

D. The Sentence On The Man – vs. 17-19

Please understand that work is not the sentence given to Adam, that somehow his was a life of leisure with nothing to do before the fall. In **chapter 1** we read that part of his job was to subdue and rule over the animal kingdom and in **chapter 2** he was to guard and tend the garden. Now it would be painful toil. He would labor at his work and sweat in the process. It would be hard work to grow food that would sustain them. Again, notice that God cursed the ground. Where originally it would be produce food abundantly and no need for tilling to plant, weed and harvest, now all that changed. Because he willingly listened to Eve, the ground was cursed and his provision would be difficult. The ground would produce thistles and thorns. Any of you who garden know how difficult it is to keep the weeds at bay. They grow faster than the crops. Instead of having an abundance of food he would have to work to make it produce. It would never be easy.

Solomon certainly understood it penning the opening words of Ecclesiastes where he wrote: **“What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 1:3-4)**

If that wasn’t bad enough, all the toil would eventually end in his death. Yet even in man’s death we see evidence of God’s grace. Even in the pain of childbirth God’s grace is found. His grace is seen in the provision of new life born to the

woman even though it comes through pain. To everyone, God's grace is seen even in death because death is, in a way, the grace of God who has said that only for so long will a person suffer in his work. Death is an end to the pain and suffering. Yes, theirs was a painful suffering, but as we have already discovered there is a promised salvation.

II. A PROMISED SALVATION – v. 15b

Oh, the grace of God how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

There are legends and myths that have prevailed throughout much of history around this passage in the epic battle between man and the serpent. For example: in Greek mythology Hercules is said to have battled a great serpent.

In the constellations Virgo is depicted holding a strand of wheat which is said to symbolize the promised seed of the woman.

Leo the lion is shown clawing the head of a great serpent.

Scorpio is depicted stinging the heel of hero Ophiuchus.

In this verse God is showing man that he can never cover up his sin, can never result in his victory or vindication over sin. Salvation can only come through God's provision and in this verse we have the promise of a Redeemer.

Scholars refer to this passage as the protoevangelum or the first gospel. Pointing to the Messiah, this verse promises the coming of a Redeemer who would be the antidote to the venomous bite of the serpent who inflicted mankind with the poison of sin. Jesus understood this. Speaking to Nicodemus He said that God loved the world so much He sent His only Son (speaking of Himself) to die so that anyone who believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life (**John 3:16**).

To the disciples He declared that He is **“the Way, the Truth, and the Life”** and that no one can come

to the Father except through Him (**John 14:6**).

Writing to the church in Rome Paul wrote that Christ became sin for us (**Romans 8:3**).

II Corinthians 5:21 “For our sake He (God) made Him (Christ) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him (Christ) we might become the righteousness of God.”

Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

I John 2:1-2 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

This very Jesus about whom we celebrate at Easter in His death, burial and resurrection is the Redeemer promised in **Genesis 3:15** who in time would come to bring salvation to all who believe.

There is the grace of God who gives to us what we don't deserve taking from us what we do deserve. **Genesis 3:15** were words of hope to Adam and Eve standing there receiving their sentence. It's as if God was saying that on the one hand there were consequences for their actions, but that faith in this promised Redeemer would bring them an acquittal.

So in the context of this passage, if God is speaking only in terms of humanity and snakes being enemies then there is no hope for mankind. But if God is speaking about the promise of a Redeemer as the offspring of the woman then in that promise God ensures our victory.

Even though Satan trampled Adam and Eve in the garden the promise here ensures the trampling of Satan by Christ on the cross. **One author stated that “the crushing defeat of Christ on the cross put the believer forever out of the reach of the enemy.”**

So how do we know if they understood what God

had just promised? I think it is revealed in what happens in the next verse where we see a personal security.

III.A PERSONAL SECURITY – v. 20

It's unclear why Adam waited until now to name his wife, but he did and he called her Eve. I envision Adam and Eve standing this whole time before God with their heads bowed low out of guilt and in humiliation for what they had just done. I also think there was genuine remorse. They couldn't undo what they had done, but God could and He offered them a promise. They had to believe God would keep His word. In disobeying they didn't believe God would do what He said. Now they had to believe God that what He had promised about this coming Redeemer would come true. It was a moment of faith for them.

I also believe that Adam was paying attention to what God told Eve. By telling Eve that she would bear children, all be it in pain, it was a way for God to say she was forgiven. Adam heard that and so he **“named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living.”**

Even though there was the curse of death, they were promised that they would live long enough to bear children. By naming her Eve, Adam was expressing faith that he trusted God to provide the offspring that would bring this promise.

Kent Hughes adds a helpful comment here: **“Adam's declaration was an overwhelming shout of hope. The name Eve celebrates the survival of the human race and victory over death.”**

Reformer Philip Melanchthon called Eve **“the seal of grace.”**

And so it is we should exuberantly sing (#344):
 Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
 grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
 Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
 there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,
 threaten the soul with infinite loss;
 grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
 points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.
 What can avail to wash it away?
 Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,
 brighter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
 freely bestowed on all who believe!
 You that are longing to see his face,
 will you this moment his grace receive?

Grace, grace, God's grace,
 grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
 grace, grace, God's grace,
 grace that is greater than all our sin!

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Embedded in this passage after the sin and during the sentencing of Adam and Eve remind us that no matter how great our sin, God's grace is always greater. He has given us a promise.

Scripture tells us that His grace is sufficient for everything and that includes salvation. No one is beyond His ability to save. His grace will exonerate you from the sentence of death so that you will not perish and on that day when you experience His salvation He says welcome to the rest of your life.