

12-29-96

GRACE IN THE GARDEN

GENESIS 3

NEED: SAVING GRACE

PROPOSITION: GOD REVEALED HIMSELF AS THE GOD OF GRACE BY HIS
RESPONSE TO THE SIN IN THE GARDEN OF
EDEN.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD SINNERS TO RECEIVE GOD'S SAVING GRACE.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the Biblical words with which we have difficulty in our day is the word grace. The translators of the new Contemporary English Version became aware of this in their first draft of their translation. One of the translators described an event in which forty leaders of the Presbyterian Church were meeting in Springfield. The translator wrote Acts 20:32 on the board which speaks of "the word of His grace." Even though these Presbyterians had attended church for years, the very first comment was: "I don't understand the meaning of the word grace." Out of this discussions and others like it the translation team realized that an English equivalent to the Greek word for grace really does not exist. They settled on a translation that they would use in most instances which reads "undeserved kindness." Whether we understand the word grace or not, it is one of the basic things revealed in the Bible about our God.

~

Even though the tempter sought to convince Eve that the God of creation was not a God of kindness interested in her well being, He is actually revealed in His response to her sin as the God who bestows undeserved kindness or grace. I want us to look at the third chapter of Genesis with the intention of seeing God revealed in this chapter as the God who gives undeserved kindness or grace.

It is nothing short of a marvel that God is revealed in the very first scene of sin as being the God of undeserved kindness, the God of grace. Consider---

I. THE PURSUIT

The incident set forth in the Scriptures differs from the contemporary presentation of sinful man. The assumption of modern culture concerning man is that he is basically good and is personally seeking to know God. What we have pictured in the contemporary understanding is man in pursuit of God. In contrast what we have pictured in Genesis 3 is God in pursuit of man. Man is the one who is hiding and God is the one who is seeking. We are confronted with the grace of God in this very first encounter between God and sinful human beings.

1. The call.

The first time God speaks after man rebels, He makes a call to the man. "But the Lord God called to the man" "Where are you?" The words of the old versions still ring in my ears when I read this text in the contemporary version. "Where art thou?"

This call sounds out for Adam not because God does not know where Adam is. Rather Adam does not know where Adam is. God's first step toward His sinful creature is to bring His sinful creature to a better understanding of where he is. The God of grace wants the man to know the seriousness of the step he has taken, the rebellion that he has made a part of his life.

2. The confrontation.

God moves from the call to confrontation. He addresses the man by saying, "Where art thou?"

When Adam explains that he was afraid and naked, then God wants to know, "Who told you that you were naked?" "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Then He turns to the woman and He says to her, "What is this that you have done?" Step by step the Creator deliberately confronts the man and the woman with their deed. It is all in the design of grace. It is a manifestation of the tough love of God for His creation - man and woman. He cares so much about them that He must confront them with the seriousness of their transgression.

3. The condemnation.

The case can be made that even the condemnation that God pronounced upon the man and the woman was an expression of His grace. When He pronounced the word on the woman that she would experience great pain in bearing children and would experience difficulties in her relationship with her husband, the Creator is acting in grace. When He announces to the man that he will earn his bread by the sweat of his brow and will encounter conflict in nature as he pursues his vocation, God is acting in grace. How can these words of judgment be expressions of grace? They are

expressions of grace because the Creator wants the man and the woman to so experience the consequences of their deed that it will cause them to turn toward Him for an answer for their problem. One of the kindest things God can do is to confront us in the events of life with the seriousness of our choices and the error of our way.

The God of grace still pursues sinners. He is still in pursuit of you. He is pursuing you to do you good and not evil. The wisest thing you can do is to surrender to His undeserved kindness and receive from Him the gift of life.

Consider---

II. THE PROMISE.

The second expression in the garden of grace is in the famous promise found in the text. "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." Some have understood this announcement by the Creator to the serpent as involving nothing more than a continuing conflict between the serpents and human beings. That understanding is too limited and too shallow. Wise students of Scripture have seen this as being the first promise of a Redeemer found in all of Scripture. It is the Creator making a promise that the ultimate outcome of man's sin can be salvation.

1. The promise of the Seed.

The Seed of the woman is particularized and individualized in the promise - "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." It is obvious that God has in mind a particular offspring of the woman.

During the Old Testament era the rabbis began to understand that this was a promise of

the Messiah who would bring about an ultimate and final victory over evil. The New Testament students of Old Testament Scripture saw this promise fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He was uniquely the Seed of the woman. There was no human father involved in His birth, but rather only the heavenly Father. Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise.

2. The wounding of the Seed.

The promise indicated that the serpent will "strike his heel." Actually, the Hebrew word translated "crush" and "strike" is the same word. Both of them have in them the idea of crushing, wounding. But, the enemy is described as "striking" the heel of the Seed. While the serpent will strike the heel of the Seed, thus inflicting upon him great pain and hurt, the pain will not be final.

This is a promise that there would be a cross in the life of the Seed of the woman. The cross would not be so much the result of man's activity as it would be the result of the enemies activity. The cross would be the place where the enemy would do its utmost to inflict pain and death upon the Seed of the woman.

3. The crushing of the serpent.

"He will crush your head." Anyone who knows anything about killing snakes knows that the way to kill a snake is to crush its head. You can cut a snake in half and it will crawl off and inflict death upon another. When you crush its head, you bring an end to all of its deadly activity. The promise is that the Seed of the woman will finally and conclusively crush the head of the serpent. This was what happened at the cross. In the cross the Seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus, dealt a

decisive and deadly blow to the head of the enemy of human kind, Satan himself! It is true that the snake is still wiggling across the earth as though nothing has happened but the ultimate destruction of the serpent has already been decided. It is only a matter of time until the serpent will be cast into the lake of fire. The issue is settled.

This is grace in the garden. God is giving to the man and the woman the hope of a Savior. They did not deserve such hope. They did not deserve any salvation. But the God of grace gives them a promise of salvation before He bans them from the Garden of Eden. He is still that same God of grace and undeserved kindness.

ID. THE PROVISION.

The third expression of God's undeserved kindness in the garden is found in the simple reference to His provision. "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." There is an indication of the undeserved kindness of God in that statement in two levels.

1. The physical.

The physical nakedness of the man and woman was a problem to them. They had sought to cover their nakedness with aprons that they had made from leaves. The nature of leaves prevent them from being a very adequate covering for human nakedness, or an adequate source of clothing.

So, the Creator in undeserved kindness makes sure that this physical need of the man and the woman is met. While at the physical level it is simply a need for clothing. The Creator is concerned about the need of these two rebellious creatures.

This is a tremendous source of encouragement to call of us. All of us have been recipients of undeserved kindness from God as He has met our needs. He has met our needs for food, shelter, and clothing even though we did not deserve it. He has met our needs for healing and health even though we did not deserve it. The gracious Creator looks after his creation even while his creation is in rebellion against Him. He is surely the God of grace and undeserved kindness.

2. The spiritual.

The language of this text encourages us to look for a deeper level of understanding. The Creator was doing more than meeting the physical need of the man and the woman. Dr. Kenneth Matthews in his new commentary on the first twelve chapters of Genesis points out how the language used in this statement is reflective of the language of sacrifice in the tabernacle. The language of sacrifice is there by implication. God takes an innocent animal and puts it to death in order to provide a covering for the man and the woman. Man was required to have a covering when he came to stand before God in the tabernacle. The priest has specific garments that must be worn any time he ministered in the presence of God. The Creator is here providing a covering at the expense of the life of another for the man and the woman as they stand in his presence.

It is noteworthy that the verb "made" is the word used in connection with the creation. Chapter 2 ended the creative activity of God, but here we find the Creator acting anew in chapter 3. This time however He is acting for the salvation of man. He is performing a new work of creation, even the sinner's salvation.

We should see in this incident a foreshadowing of what God has done for us through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the death of the innocent Son of God upon the cross an adequate covering has been made for us so that we can stand in the presence of Holy God with the assurance that we are covered and accepted. We are covered with His own righteousness which becomes available to us through the cross.

Oh, what grace! The Creator takes what ever step is necessary to provide a covering for each sinful creature. That ultimate step was taken in the person of His Son.

~
Some years ago I read of a Mrs. Beatrice Gurley in Miami, Florida, who offered a man a \$1,000 to kill her husband. She was arrested, pleaded guilty to the charge of attempted murder, but was able to walk out of the criminal court a free woman. The reason for her release, her husband whom she sought to destroy had bailed her out of jail and then pleaded with the court not to punish her, insisting that she "just got mixed up."

Judge Ben Willard, in telling the woman, Mrs. Gurley she would not be sentenced said, "I don't know any body in the world who would take a woman back after she paid someone to kill him."

Turning to Mrs. Gurley's husband, Dave, the judge asked, "You are not uneasy sleeping out there in the same house with her?"

"Not a bit," the husband replied.

-; -./ "Well, I just hope you know what you are doing" the judge responded.

This was obviously an act of undeserved kindness, grace. The woman obviously deserved condemnation for her act of treachery against her husband. But he chose to give her undeserved kindness. This is precisely what God has chosen to do for us in Christ Jesus. That He would take such an act toward us was indicated even in the garden where our sin originated. Even there He took steps to bestow upon the sinful man and the sinful woman His undeserved kindness. Let me appeal to you to receive the undeserved kindness of our God as it has made itself known in Jesus Christ. He is still ready to cover your sins and to accept you into His blessed presence.