

This is going to be a great year of study for Harbor of Hope. We are looking forward to this journey through Scripture together. I want to give you a brief insight into how we're going to do this so that our expectations match up. During the year we will be going from Garden to City- from Genesis to Revelation- and I'll explain it like this. If you've even been on a flight and had the pilot come over the intercom asking you to look out the left or the right of the airplane, what they are doing, usually is pointing out something beautiful or significant down below (the grand canyon or the rocky mountains or the everglades). They call your attention to that reference point, not only to give you an idea of where you are on the journey, but also so that you can see with your own eyes something that maybe you'd only ever heard about- albeit from 30,000 feet high.

I use that illustration to explain that we're going to be traveling through the Bible this year from cover to cover, but there are 66 books that have been compiled together to make up the Bible, and we only have 52 weekends. If you do the math you can immediately see the challenge we face. So what we're going to do is give you a flyover, ok? But along the way, I hope we are able to bring you down to ground level, at some key locations, where we can help you see some of the beautiful or significant places in Scripture. So each week we'll be digging in to inspect an important reference point within the Bible, to listen to what it tells us about God, or what it tells us about ourselves, and how we should live.

My hope for us is *not only* that we'll come to the end of the year with a wider understanding of Scripture together, or that we can navigate through our Bibles easier, but much more significant than that, I hope at the end we've come to see and know the Author behind the text. In these pages we learn about our Creator and we discover His great love for us- how He designed us to be- and who we are in Him.

It's within God's story that we find the meaning and the purpose in our own stories. My hope is that at the end of this journey through Scripture- from Garden to City- that we will love God more deeply; we'll understand Him better; we'll be more available to Him with our lives.

Last week we were in the first chapters of Genesis where Kelly helped us look at the goodness of God's creation. She helped us understand the Hebrew word: *Tove*. Today we see how quickly and drastically all of that goodness unraveled.

Genesis 3

1 *The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"*

2 *"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. 3 "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"*

4 *"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. 5 "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."*

6 *The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. 7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.*

8 *When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

10 *He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."*

11 *"Who told you that you were naked?" the Lord God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"*

12 *The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."*

13 *Then the Lord God asked the woman, "What have you done?"*

"The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."

Last week we talked about goodness and you were probably all happy and excited, and this week things get dark and we're talking about sin, which means groans all around right? But it's important for us to deal with this question about what has gone wrong with the human condition. How did we get where we are today? If you were with us at the Christmas Eve (Eve) service we talked about this briefly, the darkness of our world and of our lives, and ultimately the reason things are the way they are is because of this little word: sin.

It's such a short word to wreak such havoc, but that's exactly what sin has done. Disease, war, poverty, hunger, hatred, greed & deceit- the "magna-problems" of this world all materialize in the aftermath of this event in Genesis 3. There is a lot of good and beauty to be found, but it doesn't take a masters degree or a PhD to understand that there is something deeply wrong- something broken- in our world and in our own lives.

What happened? How do we understand this? What do we do about it?

In our text today we learn that sin has immediate consequences, but they are not the consequences we would imagine. They didn't immediately fall over dead. They didn't get a terrible stomachache. Their mouths weren't filled with sores. Look in verse 7.

7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.

Contrast that verse with Adam and Eve's previous experience in the last verse of chapter 2, where you find in verse 25, "*Now the man and his wife were both naked but they felt no shame.*"

Prior to taking a bite of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve had been naked but felt no shame. The concept of nakedness was foreign to them. There was nothing to hide; nothing to cover. In the goodness of God's creation, man and woman felt comfortable in their own skin. They could be themselves both with each other and with God. No masks. No veneer. Nothing to dress up, or hide behind.

The very first consequence of sin- before separation from God, before death, before pain and suffering- was shame. Adam and Eve who had only ever been content and satisfied, whole and complete their entire lives, suddenly felt the need to cover their nakedness.

The title of my message today is The Origin of Separation, meaning the origin of man's separation from God, and that's the ultimate consequence of sin. The first man and woman are cast out of the Garden. They are no longer able to abide there with God. Sin causes separation. It divides. It creates a gulf between God and man. But before separation, came shame.

You're familiar with shame, aren't you? I know I am. Ashamed of something I did. Ashamed of something I did not do. Ashamed of where I've been. Ashamed of the hurt I've caused. Ashamed of how I look. Ashamed, by the fact that I'm not ashamed- that behaviors which used to evoke a heart of repentance, now doesn't elicit a response in my conscience at all.

I've often told the story of the first time I ever felt truly ashamed. I was 11 years old and it was the same time of year as it is now- just post Christmas. I had returned to class after the holiday break having not received the Christmas gift I'd wanted most, which made me all the more dissatisfied when one of my classmates chose to bring that very thing to show our class. It was a fancy red transformer called Sideswipe. A Lamborghini that turns into a robot. Nicely appointed with articulated arms and legs. Made of a substantive metal. It was truly the envy of every boy who did not get one for Christmas. If you've heard me tell this story before, you know I was simply jealous beyond belief, so when the boy

left it out where I could get to it without anyone seeing, I actually took it off my teacher's desk and put it in my coat pocket and went back to my seat.

I knew it was a terrible decision as soon as I had done it. I was trying to devise a plan for returning it to the desk with as much stealth as I had used in stealing it when the boy's mother appeared in our classroom. She was there to take the transformer home, because, apparently, she did not trust her son to return it there safely. The problem was, it was no longer on the teacher's desk. It was in my coat pocket!

When the dreaded words, "no one is leaving this classroom until the transformer is found!" were invoked, I knew I was in big trouble. There was only one thing to do. I was supposed to leave class early that day to attend a student council meeting. I got up and told my teacher that it was time for me to leave and he looked down at me and asked, "Jeff, did you take the transformer?" To which I looked up at him and replied, "no."

I left the room, feeling lower than low, yet unable to face the consequences of my actions. Shame. I knew the feeling for the first time that day. It was not a sense of nakedness like with Adam and Eve in the Garden, but it was no less regretful. Quite like Adam and Eve I chose to hide rather than coming forward with what I had done. I couldn't take that toy home with me, it felt like a load of bricks, but I did not want anyone to know I had taken it- so I left it in the door to the janitors closet and prayed that somehow it would find its way home.

Every time I tell that story I inevitably have someone come up to me afterwards, very much like God in the Garden as ask, "What have you done? You should track down that kid and make amends." They see an injustice that has been done, and they want something to be done about it. And they're right. Sin has consequences. Always. One of those is shame.

If we were to have all of our actions and thoughts from the past projected on these screens for everyone to see, could any of us face that kind of exposure without shame? Is there a one of us who wouldn't want to run and hide? Could any among us face that display without shame? No. In spite of how good we all want to be as people, every one of us can identify with Adam and Eve in that Garden. In spite of how good we aspire to be as husbands or wives, as fathers or mothers, as sons or daughters, we find that we fall far short. In spite of how gracious and generous I want to be I find that reality pales in comparison. We can relate to what Jesus described when he said, 'the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.'

There is a problem in our world. There is a problem in us. We can all identify it, we've all experienced it. The question is, why? Why did God set it up this way?

Let's go back to our text for a moment, but before we do, can we just agree on something together first? Can we agree how strange it is that everything in this text is centered around a tree and some fruit? If you can't admit that's an odd place for all of this to start then you must be on a different level than I am. It's strange. Curious at best.

1 *The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"*

2 *"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. 3 "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"*

4 *"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. 5 "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."*

If you're like me, the question you want to ask at this point (outside of 'why is Eve talking to a snake!?) is, "Why would God place a tree in the garden that He didn't want His creation to eat from?" Why did He put that there in the first place, if He knew good and well that all these years later we would be wallowing in the muck as a result? Why didn't He just take that option off the table?

Those are huge questions. For so many people the lack of a good answer on these questions becomes the reason they cannot believe in God, because how could a good and loving God allow evil to enter the world? Maybe these are the questions that keep you from trusting in God.

I don't want to offer you any trivial answers today. I don't pretend to fully know or understand the mind of God. But I'll say this, when you begin to investigate Scripture and you get to Genesis chapter 2 where God says to Adam that the entire garden is for him, he can eat from any tree except one (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), there's not a lot of information for us to grapple with and maybe that was God's intent. On this particular issue of the tree, God simply wanted Adam to trust Him.

The fact that it's a tree with forbidden fruit on it isn't the point. It could have been a river they couldn't cross, or a mountain they couldn't climb. The point was, God wanted Adam to believe that he had been given all of the goodness he would need to delight in this life. The essence of God's message was that He wanted us to trust Him. Trust His plan and provision.

One could ask, is it possible to have a real relationship (not an obligation, or something robotic- but a real relationship) if the other party has no choice in the matter? I don't think so. God placed the tree in the garden because he wanted humanity to simply trust Him. He made one rule that we could choose to obey or disobey, and without it we would simply be robots at His command. If not for the tree with its off-limits fruit, there's no free will. There's no choice. Free will is God's gift to us. Having a choice provides us with the ability to bring God worship with our lives or not. I don't blame God for Adam and Eve's bad choice, any more than I blame Him for my own. He created a rule to obey because without choice, it's not a relationship.

But that doesn't mean I don't cringe as this narrative plays its way out.

6 *The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.*

God gave mankind the ability to choose, and we chose poorly.

Watching Adam and Eve make this horrendous decision, two questions come to mind.

First, what were they thinking? There's one off-limits tree in the garden. One! And they don't have the restraint to say 'no' to a snake in the grass! It's almost comical, except it isn't. And here's the reality- we like to think we're smarter than they were, that we would never make a choice that stupid, but we're just as susceptible to temptation as they were. Pick the right target, find the right moment and we're just as likely to fold as they were. I despise this about myself. I like to believe that I'm capable of always making good choices, of being a person of character and integrity in all areas, and then a shiny red transformer sits on my teacher's desk and before I know it I find myself a thief and a liar. Ashamed. Have you been there?

This leads me to the second question I want to ask God when I consider Adam and Eve's sin: Why do the consequences have to be so severe?

God, you put that fruit out there in the Garden, all luscious and shiny and begging to be eaten. Why do you have to make the consequences for taking a bite so harsh? Isn't that one of the questions we want to ask? Why does sin have such horrific consequences? Couldn't it just end with shame? Just feeling bad about it? Why does sin have to lead to separation? Why does it bring us suffering, pain, and death?

Listen, I'm with you on this one. I don't understand. But my lack of understanding doesn't mean the punishment isn't just. This might be the point at which we differ, I don't know, but I choose to respect God's justice. He set the punishment for sin and it's severe. Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death..."* I don't understand it, I wish it wasn't so, but it is, and I choose to respect God's judgment.

Here's why:

First, because I've seen the heart of God toward His children and it's rooted in love.

You can see evidence for this even in our text. God comes looking for Adam and Eve.

8 *When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

10 *He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."*

11 *"Who told you that you were naked?" the Lord God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"*

12 *The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."*

13 *Then the Lord God asked the woman, "What have you done?"*

Does God have to ask? Of course not. He's God. Nothing is hidden from Him. But He does ask, He creates conversation where none was needed. They broke His command, He doesn't have to talk it over with them, but He does. He questions, He instructs. He draws near. Let me ask you, is this the behavior of one who is callous and cold-hearted? I don't think it is. To me God responds just like a parent would. Not eager to punish, seeking to understand- to correct.

God didn't just impose judgment, though He could have, and to me this is an indication of His great love for His children. This reminds me of what Peter wrote, (2 Peter 3:9):

"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."

God loves us and that's the first reason I trust Him. Here's the second: I choose to trust God because He was not content to allow us to remain separated from Him.

In our text for today we've learn about the origin of our separation from God. Adam and Eve sinned and the ramifications of that disobedience have been rippling through history ever since. We experience them all too frequently. Shame, Heartache, Pain, Disappointment, even Death. God could have been content to let the cycle repeat itself until the end of time, but He was not. He made a way for us to be reunited, restored, reborn.

Our God is a just God- make no mistake. The wages of sin are still death, but Romans 6 goes on to say, *"but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

1 John 3:1a says it this way, *"See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!"*

Two of my very favorite Scriptures are these:

12 *Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. (Ephesians 3:12)*

14 *So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. 15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. 16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. (Hebrews 4:14-16)*

.
. .
.