



Sermon "As we approach advent"

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Genesis 3

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I. Introduction

Today is the start of a short break from our series in the book of John. As you may know, the season of Advent starts next Sunday, but I wanted to use today's service to prepare our hearts for next week. Today is a time to reflect on the great significance of the birth of Jesus for the world. And in preparation for the season, I thought we should be reminded of what we were created for. Jesus was born into the world not just to save humankind from enslavement to sin. Jesus was born to restore humankind's created function; to glorify their Heavenly Father's rule over His creation. With that in mind...

Have you ever felt like you were created for something more? You know, more influence or impact in the world. I was speaking with a church leader some time ago about their service in the church and they said that they really like having more responsibility in the church because they felt by doing that, they were growing in their relationship with Jesus and in their capacity to serve. They wanted to do more because it helped them to grow.

But by being ambitious to do more and to grow doesn't come without its difficulties, does it? As you take on more responsibility, you inevitably will have more challenges. Recently Jo and I were able to join a ZOOM meeting where the Director of Health, Ashley Bloomfield, shared how challenging it was and is to face all the reporters during the 1:00p briefings! Responsibility for the welfare of the nation also caused him to have some sleepless nights as well.

Isn't it true that both, the desire to grow and the presence of increasing pressure, can make for a joyful and frustrating life? We feel a need to keep on growing, but we also face greater obstacles as we grow older.

In today's passage, we are looking at the foundation for why we desire to grow and why growth is more difficult than it ought to be. We will see that we were made to have a global impact because we were made by God who governs the globe. But because humankind decided to grow on its own, separated from God, our growth is suppressed because of humankind's enslavement to error.

II. Context

First, let's look at the context of today's account in the Bible.

1.) Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness...(to) be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

In Genesis 1:26–30, we all know that the Bible states that we all were created by God. But we may forget that we were created in His image and likeness. That is, we are His offspring, created to reveal His glory as ruler and King over creation. In this account God says to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” Everything in the seas, sky and land was given to humankind to rule over it as God himself would.

This explains why we all feel the desire to have more impact in the world. It’s why you can watch farmers on Country Calendar say that their goal is to create new ways of farming that will change how all farming around the world is done! It explains why we all have an insatiable desire to learn and grow, to have greater and greater impact.

2.) God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

In Genesis 1:31, we see that we weren’t only made to have a global impact as God’s offspring, but that we were good as well. Good, not in our own evaluations which change each generation. We were good in a global sense. We were good as seen by God himself. And you wonder what might it be like to be eager to grow to have a global impact and be good enough to accomplish it! We all know that it’s usually the bad things we do that seem to prevent us from growing. But what if all humankind was in relationship with God and good again? What would their impact be like?

Well we know when God united Himself with humankind after the disciples of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit, we know that they quickly had a growing global impact that continues today! God’s goodness in them compelled them to serve everyone and to show no favouritism. It compelled them to serve even those that hated them. It compelled them to even risk great punishment as they served others. But for the rest of humankind that hasn’t been reunited to God’s goodness, their growth is confined by their resistance to God’s goodness in His Son.

As we start to look at today’s passage, let’s notice three challenges for humankind, three challenges that prevents us from growing to have a godly global impact as we rule over creation united with God.

III. Unpack

1.) Approached by Evil

In Genesis 3:1–5, Adam and Eve, with their mandate from God to glory His rule over all the world, are suddenly approached by a potential stumbling block. They are approached by evil. The first thing that evil does is to discredit the source of their goodness. “Did God really say?” is the crafty attack of evil upon humankind’s global rule with God. It’s possibly important that it is a crafty attack and not a clear and bold attack. Why? It’s possibly easier to disengage from evil if it’s clear its intent is to destroy you. Instead, evil just seemingly asks a question. But the question is meant to trigger doubt. Evil asks a question as if he is the learner and Eve is the good ruler from God. Seemingly submissive, yet cunningly looking to destroy faith in God and displace Eve from her global impact to submissiveness and slavery.

Eve, still acting with Adam as God's rulers over Creation, seeks to rightly govern the serpent by teaching it. She repeats the command that God has given her. She thinks she is correcting the Serpent, she thinks she is serving the Serpent as a good ruler. Now the Serpent continues his ruse as a submissive learner for Eve's good rule. He has tried to create doubt about God's word, now he attempts to inflate the ego of Eve!

He seems to say, "You're a good ruler. Nothing bad will happen to you! God only gave you the command because He's jealous that your rule will be just as good as His! God knows that if you do eat of the fruit that He said you shouldn't, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing everything." God has made Eve a good ruler over creation. Maybe she should be equal to Him as well?

2.) Tempted by Evil

In Genesis 3:6–7, being tempted by the falsely submissive Serpent, Eve doubts God's word. She agrees with the Serpent under her care, and looks at the tree no longer as God's ruler but as a ruler in her own right. She decides. She thinks the fruit of the tree was "good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom." So she decides for herself to eat it and go against God's command. Adam is no better! He also takes the fruit and eats it.

What did these previously good ruler over Creation gain from choosing themselves what to do? Their eyes were opened. But not in the sense of being like God as was promised by the Serpent they thought was submissive to their rule. Their eyes are opened and they realize they no longer joined with God. They are no longer filled with His Spirit. Removing the only source of good, they are left naked, not only physically but more importantly spiritually. No longer will they be able to rule over Creation with the goodness they shared with God. Now they will struggle to do good on their own. Now they will make their own coverings not only for their bodies, but also for their souls.

3.) Enslaved to Evil

In Genesis 3:8–13, now the woman and the man are no longer good. Sure, they can still function in the world. They can care for the land. They can care for one another. They can have children. But they are no longer continuously united with goodness Himself. So when goodness comes into the garden, they hide themselves. Humankind created to impact the world for good. Now, humankind retreated into a shell of shame. Covering their nakedness and now hiding from God.

Of course they didn't hide from each other, Adam and Eve. They had both fallen their high position and freedom. Surely, just as we do today that might have thought they were still basically good. But when perfect good, real goodness approached, they hid. Wouldn't we do the same?

And when God confronts them about what they have done, they continue to retreat back and cover their shame. Now, their covering is to attack someone besides themselves for what has happened. Their covering is to draw God's attention to someone else! When God asks Adam if he has disobeyed his command, Adam points blame outward.

He says, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Adam first blames God! "It was the woman you provided," God that did this to me. Next, Adam is clearly

blaming Eve for giving him the fruit. Adam blames others and portrays himself as...the victim. Adam seems to say that here he was doing good in the garden then all of sudden, he is victimized by God and the woman He has created. God makes a woman, she comes to Adam and gives him the fruit which he was forbidden to eat and so, I guess his logic is, he had to eat it!

Eve is no better! When God turns to her, and asks, "What is this you have done?" Eve also thinking of herself as a innocent victim said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

What does God do next? How does goodness reply? In verse 21 we read, "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." God who is the only source of perfect goodness, responds by covering their shame. Although this covering is only for their bodies, His plan is now to provide a covering for their soul. Humankind will have to wait in anticipation for that perfect covering that will restore to humankind their dignity as children of God, made to glorify God's good rule over His creation.

IV. Application

1.) Remember We Were Made to Share God's Glory

Yes, we were made to share in God's glory. We were created to be His offspring and rule over all of God's creation with a goodness from God that was unfaltering. We weren't made to feel ashamed about serving others. We weren't made to pass up promotions because we didn't think we were good enough! We were made to be good enough! We were made to be globally ambitious, not for ourselves but for our Heavenly Father's glory and will.

This is very important, because we know how often we can refuse to take responsibility in our work, community or church. Some of us think we don't have what it takes to be able to help many people. Maybe we think we can only help our families and friends. But from creation, we must see that we were created to serve everyone. Everyone! We were made to serve people from around the world. We were made to serve all of creation.

There are some of us that have less of a struggle realizing their global value. Let them be examples for us to encourage us to walk in that same truth which applies to everyone. Ashley Bloomfield said that the community that shaped him the most as a person was the community at Tawa Baptist Church in Wellington. He said that the book of James was a motivating source for him as his responsibilities grew in his career. Of course, he feels anxious given national-level responsibilities, but he said that by keeping focused on what he can do, not what he can't better, ensures that his faith will be made complete with action. Let's learn from those who are more open to humbly serving in a greater way.

2.) Remember We Were Enslaved to Sin

This has come up several times in my previous sermons but isn't difficult to remember? It's humbling! We used to be slaves to sin and judged by God for it. Even though it's difficult to comprehend because we tend to think we are better than most people, but we were all in God's eyes enslaved to unrighteousness.

Remembering this in our preparation for the Advent season, should help us to see ourselves in our neighbour. When we see people advocate for wickedness, we should remember that without Jesus we were no different. In fact, we still struggle with sin even being united with the life of Jesus.

Abortion is a humbling example. I remember as a young Christian how vocal people in my church used to be regarding the horror of abortion. But for those of us that started following Jesus in our adulthood, were we as horrified by abortion before meeting Jesus? For those of us that have been in the church all their lives, do we find ourselves still calling for repentance of the government?

We were enslaved to sin, but sin still weighs us down and makes living in righteousness difficult.

V. Conclusion

But our Heavenly Father is a good and righteous Father. He did not leave us or abandon us when we rebelled against Him. He did not leave or abandon us to our enslavement to sin and destruction. The Good Father rescued us by sending His very Son so that we might be restored as children of God, children created to share in God's unsurpassed glorious reign. This glorious example of love was given, this shining light of truth came into the darkened world.

This Advent season may we notice in ourselves and those around us that the darkness still exists. People still don't see the value of Jesus for us, for creation. This Advent season, may we follow God's Spirit that we may more fully value...treasure Jesus, God's plan to restore us to shared glory. And may we testify to our neighbours our increasing devotion to Jesus this Advent season.

Blessings!