



In May of 2005, a girl by the name of Natalee Holloway made international news because she went missing in Aruba. She was from Arkansas, and she went with friends on a graduation trip. She was supposed to arrive home on May 30, and she wasn't on the flight. There were searches and investigations, but her body has never been found. I think it was around 10 years after this horrifying event that there was some kind of special on television about this story. At one point in the special, Natalee's mom, Beth, was asked how she could handle such tragedy. How could she move on with life when her daughter was not only probably dead, but people closed the search for her? Beth's response was something like this: If you live for something and it goes away, then you have to find something new to replace it with to give you meaning. And if that thing dies, then you find another thing.

My heart still sinks as I hear this response because Beth is acknowledging that nothing in this world satisfies fully, and yet she's going to keep searching for meaning in broken things in this world. But she could turn to God and find eternal meaning, purpose, identity, and hope – even when everything here falls apart. Now, I don't say this to point the finger at Beth and look down on her. Instead, I believe this is the impulse of all human beings. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1, all humans have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. . . .”¹ This is what Beth said she was doing. She was living for one thing, and then another, and then another to give her the drive to live and move on. This is worship. The word “worship” simply means “worth-ship.” Whatever you live for, and give supreme worth to, is what you worship. This isn't simply a problem for Beth. This is a problem for us, too! In any given day, what types of things do you turn to for hope, meaning, identity, purpose? And what happens to you if any of those things are taken away from you? Do you turn to the Lord or do you just turn to another *thing*? Do you believe the things of this world are going to give you meaning or do you realize that only God can do that?

The reason I say all of this is because as I think through what we're looking at in Genesis today, I see how these words would have both confronted and comforted the original readers of Genesis. Who was the original audience? The Jews wandering in the wilderness. They've left Egypt, along with its false worship of everything: gods of the sun, water, frogs, fertility, and so on. In the wilderness, we know how often the Israelites are not only tempted to complain, but to turn away from God and turn to what they can see to satisfy them – in place of God. They tend to think that their way is going to satisfy them, but it never does. Isn't that exactly what happens with Adam and Eve's temptation and fall into sin and punishment? The serpent, Satan, promises that they'll be like God, knowing good and evil. Then they sin, and they become totally exposed and are overwhelmed in shame. What they thought would bring a new identity and life brought shame, brokenness, and death. Yet, we also hear words of mercy from God to Adam and Eve. And this is what happens to the Israelites in the wilderness, too. It's so profound. Where we read these stories and might be tempted to want God to just start over, God shows mercy upon mercy.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 1:25.

We now enter chapter 3 again, and we've already covered most of God's statements of punishment, and today, we're coming to a conclusion to the punishments by focusing on God's words to Adam. And then we'll continue to move through the end of chapter 3. What we see in God stating his punishment to Adam is that Adam and Eve are needy for God. They weren't needy for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They weren't needy for things around them. They're needy for God. And now, the brokenness that Adam and Eve (and all humanity) is facing is to serve as a reminder to all of humanity that we all are needy for God. With this backdrop, I want to share the main idea of the sermon. It's that **The covenant-keeping God compels us to see our need for him by giving mercy through judgment to Adam, Eve, and humanity.** We'll break this passage up into three sections to see this. Let's begin with

1. God's judgment to Adam (vv. 17-19).

Let's read verses 17-19: ¹⁷And 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; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By 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."²

What's God saying to Adam here? Some people have said that God punished Adam for two reasons: 1) he listened to his wife, and 2) he ate from the tree. They view these as two separate things and even emphasize that men aren't supposed to listen to their wives because their wives need to listen to them. Ok, heads up, if any man tells you that, be concerned. How can a woman be the helper fit for the man if she never speaks and he doesn't have to listen to her? If a man says this, he's abusing Scripture in order to control you.

So, what's being said here? In the Hebrew form, the "and" is bringing the two ideas together – not stating two separate things. What happened was that Adam was passive during Eve's temptation. He listened to the serpent tempt her and did nothing. Then he listened to Eve and took the fruit from the tree he wasn't supposed to eat from. In this scenario, he ought to have cared for his wife and led and protected her from the serpent instead of heeding what she said – because it was sin.

Because Adam sinned, God now decrees the punishment. It's similar to the previous punishments. To the serpent, God essentially states that **the serpent will want to rule over the seed of the woman, but will be thwarted. The woman will want to rule over the man, but will be thwarted. Then here, the man will want to rule over the earth, but will be thwarted.** Why is the punishment for Adam related to the ground? Well, 5 times, God uses the word "eat" to emphasize that Adam's temptation related to eating and then him thinking he'd receive life through what he ate. Now, through God's punishment, what's going to happen is that he's going to see that he does *need* to eat, but even with all his work to get food, the earth isn't going to cooperate. And while he might want to rule over the earth to make it give him what he wants, he's going to eventually die and the ground is going to win. To dust Adam will return. This isn't just the case for Adam. This is the case of every human being after him. We work and toil to get the earth to give us what we want – whether food or other materials to be able to make things and to make money so that we can have food and we can live. But guess what? We do all of that, and the earth is going to win. It's going to swallow us all up!

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:17–19.

This should give us perspective on our work in this life. Some people look at this punishment and say that work is a result of the fall, but that's not true. Work is a good gift of God. It's the "sweat of the face" – the difficulty and pain that is a part of the fall. It's that work doesn't breed life that is a part of the fall. So, how ought this affect our thinking? I mean, we all live in this fallen world, don't we? Yes! So, how do you view work? I think that the punishment God gives is to emphasize to humanity that we need God, but we humans are stubborn. Instead of allowing the pains and toils of work to point us to the Lord, we tend to make an idol of work. Or, we tend to try to anesthetize ourselves from the toils of work. Think about it a little more with me. In our culture, if you meet someone new, what's one of the first questions you ask them? It's what they do for a living. And when you talk to people in our day, many times they define themselves by their accomplishments in their work: I *am* an engineer or I do this or that thing. And, many people wonder if their work has any purpose if they feel like unaccomplished or underappreciated. So, I think in our American culture, we try to mask the toils of work, and the reality of the Fall, by ensuring everyone's doing jobs that make them feel happiest. I think many people feel the vanity of work, but instead of turning to the Lord for wholeness, they might quit their job to find a new one or they might work harder to get more meaning. And so we have workaholics who just want to be "faithful" in their job or we have people who have given up and turned to something else or some substance to give them release from the vanity. Neither are the answer.

I'm reminded of Ecclesiastes 2:22-24 that says, "²²What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? ²³For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. ²⁴There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"³ These verses don't give a full answer to how God enables us to have enjoyment in our toil, but the Preacher declares that if we do not turn to God, our work is vanity and there really can't be enjoyment. So, let me ask you this: **Does the vanity of labor lead you to the LORD God or to seeking more meaning in your work?** If you turn to the Lord in the pains and vanity, you have found Life, to turn back to work (or something else in this world) is continued death. The covenant-keeping God compels us to see our need for him through his judgment. Now, let's move to the next point:

2. God's mercy to Adam and Eve (vv. 20-21).

Read verses 20-21 with me: ²⁰The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. ⁴

These words might feel out of place, but they're beautifully in place. They create such a glorious contrast for us! You might remember the illustration I gave about going to a jewelry store and asking to see a piece of jewelry and how the jeweler will put that piece on a darker cloth. That's what going on here. In the midst of chaos. In the midst of darkness. In the midst of judgment, look at the glorious diamond of God's glorious mercy!

As we think about Adam and Eve's sin, we should think that chaos has entered the world because sin has entered. But we should also remember Genesis 1:2 that revealed that God took the chaos of the darkness, waters, and void and made a beautiful creation! If God could do that in Genesis 1, then do you think Adam and Eve's sin can thwart God? Absolutely not! Mercy comes through judgment. This is the character of God. As I read the words here, I'm reminded of God's words in Ephesians 2:8: **For by grace**

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 2:22–25.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:20–21.

you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. . .”⁵ I see God’s grace working through Adam’s God-given faith! Do you see it? If not, look with me. In verse 20, Adam names his wife Eve. She’s actually not called Eve before this moment. Up until this moment, she’s called Woman. Now she’s Eve. And what does Eve mean? It means “mother of all living.” How can this be? If anything, she should be named the mother of all dead. She ate the fruit from the tree that led to Adam’s eating that led to us returning to the dust. But Adam calls her the mother of all living! How can Adam say that? Is he ignoring reality? Is he ignoring God’s punishments to them? No. He intently heard God’s words. Remember what God said to the serpent? Look at verse 15: **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.”**⁶ Adam knows God’s character. In the midst of judgments, God is promising mercy. Through a child that comes from woman. Even though childbearing could bring death and will bring all sorts of pains, there will be one seed of the woman who will reverse the curse! As a result, Adam names her Eve. This is mercy, amen? And Adam wants Eve to be known for this hope. The woman isn’t to be known for her traitorous activity. She’s to be known as one through whom God’s mercy is at work! So, she was called Eve. What love! What grace!

But mercy doesn’t stop here. Did you see what happened in verse 21? The LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and Eve to wear. Remember that after Adam and Eve sinned, they made cloths for themselves out of fig leaves. And the indication from Moses’ writing is that they put this on because they felt their deep shame. Yet, the fig leaves couldn’t hide themselves from God. God’s all-seeing eyes pierced them. But here, God gives them new clothes. What does this indicate? First, it indicates that shame is a part of this fallen world – hence we cloth our nakedness. Second, only God can remove our shame. But how does an animal skin do this? Think again of the original audience reading this narrative. The Israelites. God gave them a sacrificial system to signify that sin always leads to death and the death of another could atone for your sins. And so, here the Israelites get to read of the first instance of an animal being sacrificed for them, and by putting on the skins, it signifies that they are now clothed and the shame and guilt is taken away.

You might think I’m reading too much into this, but I’m reminded of a story about a man named Joshua, who was a High Priest in the prophecies of Zechariah. Listen to these words: **Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.**² **And the Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?”**³ **Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.**⁴ **And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.”**⁷ Satan is the accuser. And, you know what? Satan was right: Joshua was a mess. But God rebukes Satan and clothes Joshua in clean clothes, which signifies that his sins are forgiven! Now, let’s get back with Adam and Eve. This is exactly what’s taking place here. God’s mercy is on display. God is showing his forgiveness towards Adam and Eve. The death of another brings their forgiveness.

This is powerful, Ventura, because I want you to imagine what it would be like for Adam and Eve after their sin. Every moment of pain, every mother or child that dies in pregnancy, every groan came because Adam and Eve sinned. Can you imagine the weight of guilt and shame that they could have felt? I think you and I can. You and I each have sins that we could look back to in our lives and feel utterly ashamed. Some, or many, of us have sins that we rarely speak of or don’t even want to remember because the

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 2:8.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:15.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Zec 3:1–4.

pain is so great. But is that how God's forgiven children are to live? No. God didn't keep Adam and Eve in their fig leaves. He gave them new clothes. He forgave them, and Adam, through faith, believed God's promise of the serpent-crusher. And so, even though sin came through Adam, God's reconciling grace speaks louder than his sin. How does this relate to you? Do you have sins that continue to dog you and define you? Will you look to the Lord for forgiveness and grace? Are there sins in your past that you allow to still weigh you down in guilt and shame – sins that God rescued you from and forgave you of? Are you thinking more about those sins than about God's gracious forgiveness of you – that he has clothed you with Jesus' righteousness? As Romans 6-8 teaches, if you've trusted in Jesus, you're no longer a slave. You're a son and daughter of God! This mercy ought to draw all of us to him! Do you know this God? Have you turned to him for mercy? The covenant-keeping God compels us to see our need for him by giving mercy to Adam and Eve. Now, we move to the final verses:

3. God's judgment (and mercy) to humanity (vv. 23-24).

Let's read verses 22-24 again: ²²Then 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—" ²³therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He 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.⁸

Our Triune God is speaking to himself, stating that Adam and Eve now know good and evil. Meaning, we have now been immersed in knowing the difference. Confusion and pain have entered our lives. So, God then keeps humanity from taking from the tree of life. You might think this is mean and selfish of God, but it's exactly the opposite. What if sinful Adam and Eve would have eaten from the tree? Then they would have the same fate as Satan. They'd be cursed for all eternity future – no hope for salvation and rescue. So, for a time – and we don't know how long – the garden remained on the earth and angelic cherubim guarded the entrance to the garden so that humanity couldn't eat from the tree of life. This speaks to God's mercy to all human beings. Kicking us out of the garden was best because it kept us from destroying ourselves forever. And yet again, this reveals how needy we are for the Lord. But how can we be brought back to the Lord? All of the punishments point to One who will rescue. And this is Jesus. If you know your neediness, I pray you'd look to Jesus because:

Jesus is **the serpent-crusher & seed of the woman who took death and gives life by giving us his righteousness as our covering and reverses the curse of work and is victorious over the dust.**

Instead of trying to take life and live apart from God (like Adam), he depended on the Lord and drank death. He took the punishment sinners deserved. But he rose from the dead, conquering death. A man of the dust, conquered the dust of the earth! Now, he calls everyone everywhere to turn to him and receive life! Instead of trying to find eternal life from this world, stop your never-ending cycle and find rest in Jesus. Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb, and now he is our righteousness. He clothes us. And he empowers us to follow and obey the Lord! Even though we're in a vain world, if our work is done in faith, it matters for eternity. And even though we will still die and become dust, Jesus conquered death and will raise us up. The dust won't win. Jesus wins!

The covenant-keeping God compels us to see our need for him by giving mercy through judgment to Adam, Eve, and humanity. Do you see his judgment? Will you trust him for his mercy? We are needy for him! Will you continue to turn to this world for identity, hope, meaning, and purpose or will you be filled by God himself through Jesus?

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:22–24.