

“Good News for Adam!”

Genesis 3: 17-19

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Text: Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

As we move further into the Christmas Season of 2011, we're taking an unusual turn this morning. It's the season of "Advent" meaning the days preceding the coming of the Christ child. We celebrate Advent every year. Christians consider it the four Sundays preceding Christmas. But when did "Advent" really begin? Should we see it as only a few weeks before Christmas? Or did Advent begin in the age of the Prophets who foretold the coming of Christ? Or did Advent begin way back when in the Garden of Eden? An interesting question. First, let us pray.

In 1997, Hollywood released the motion picture called "Titanic." It was of course the story of the great passenger ship that could not sink...but it *did* sink off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland in April of 1912. Picture it with me. The ship's Captain Edward Smith is napping in his stateroom when the massive vessel hits an iceberg and begins to come apart in the freezing waters. Screaming and shoving and shouting are taking place on every deck. Crowds are panicking because there are not enough life boats. Grown men are crying with the children they are holding as their mothers sob. Ironically, the ship's orchestra is playing classical music and show tunes and people are getting ready to die. Gunshots are heard and the world aboard the Titanic is in complete chaos with humanity fighting humanity to survive!

Ultimately, over fifteen hundred people will drown in the North Atlantic. But in a sense, perhaps the most moving scene in the film is when we see Captain Smith standing alone in his stateroom. He is a figure to be pitied. He has decided to go down with his ship and his face is totally distraught. He is breathing but lifeless. Without any words, the distant glaze in his eyes says it all. **He** is responsible for the horrible deaths of all of those people...men, women and children. **He** made a choice that resulted in their terrifying circumstances. **He** is filled with grief and regret. **His** actions...what **he** did or did not do...have brought this about and he no longer wants to live. All hope is gone. There is no good news for Edwards that night. Only pain and misery and death. His only escape is to die with those people who are in his care. No rescue ship will reach them and there is no good news coming his way. Only death. For Captain Edwards there was no advent...no coming of a savior. Edwards was responsible for all of the lives of all of those people and he knows it and he is sick at his own failure to keep them safe. He dies without hope.

Consider Adam, the first man. He had to know that he brought death and suffering into the world. He had to know that it was his neglect and his pride and his arrogance that has brought about universal death. Like Captain Edwards, Adam is a pitiful figure only a trillion times more pathetic. But rarely if ever have we heard a sermon or teaching on Adam's heartache after he fell into sin. The fall of man is always attributed to Adam and not to Eve because he was made first and he was told what he could and could not do. And when God came upon them in the garden after their disobedience, God spoke directly to Adam! There was Adam ashamed and trying to hide himself with coverings. He tells God he realized he was naked. That is, he realized he was now covered with sin that could not be hidden! And God said:

Genesis 3:11 (NIV) ¹¹ "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Then God told him of his recompense for disobedience. God said:

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field."

God had already said to Eve:

Genesis 3:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

A ship's Captain can waste the lives of his passengers but Adam has wasted the lives of everyone who will ever follow him on planet Earth! Adam is ashamed and perhaps he wishes he could just die...if only he could go and lock himself away in the cabin and not live to contemplate the misery his disobedience has brought on all of his children who will ever come from his body. I think Adam was as sick and broken as that ship Captain times ten billion. *Because Adam lived to see the effects of the curse he brought down.*

Ever since that judgment upon Adam and his family, including all of us, man has labored to offset the effects of God's punishment. Indeed, one man, Adam, made a very bad decision. A decision to rebel against God's requirements and we are still dealing with that bad decision. Adam's evil and wicked decision explains all the funerals and Adam's decision to rebel against God explains all the wars and Adam's rebellion explains all of the stealing and cheating and sin that screams across our world...and leaves us, if we think about, living our lives much of the time just trying to cope with the consequences of his disobedience. And good Biblical theology tells us this unpleasant and mysterious truth: we were in Adam when he did it so in God's eyes we are guilty with him. We may not have helped Adam chose to be rebellious but we receive his curse like a child in the womb of a heroin addict who is born addicted.

That is why man spends nearly all of his time finding ways to mitigate...to lessen in effect...to mitigate the curse upon himself. And, because God is merciful, man has had great success in doing that. Consider...God told Adam that his work would now be toil. Their ground would be rough and filled with weeds and it would be unproductive requiring tremendous toil and labor. But man invented plows and then horse drawn tractors and then modern machines. So that today, the farmer in some cases can work the ground in a great air-conditioned giant machine that does the hard work while he sits in comfort and even plays music. Man has labored to offset the curse upon Adam.

Eve was told that she would bear her children in great pain and suffering. But man has invented ways of keeping mother and child safe and, if the mother wants it, to free her from all pain in childbirth. And all of the other related aspects of the curse of God upon Adam and his family remain but God has enabled man to find ways to

reduce their intensity. Man has found ways to irrigate hard ground and he has invented medicines to cure diseases and today he even transplants limbs and eyes. Every time you take an Advil you are acting to mitigate the curse upon Adam. In fact, one might say that since the fall of Adam... all of human history is the story of man trying to clean up the mess and the effects of Adam being a very poor Captain of humanity.

How pitiful was Adam? Have any of us ever felt even a moment of pity for Adam not just because he and Eve were sent away from God but because of his heartache. He must have left the Garden with his head hanging and saying "Oh what have I done?" But the worst parts of the curse from God upon Adam were yet to come. When the Word of God mentions the ground being hard to work and child bearing being done in pain...that does not mean the curse of God upon Adam was just about those things. Adam was about to discover the worst aspect of that curse...one far worse than hard fields and pain in childbirth.

Consider what happened after they were expelled from the Garden. They had two sons. One was named Cain and the other was named Abel. And they grew into young men who were at least a little religious. One day they each brought offerings to God. God was blessed by what Abel brought him but Cain's offering was an insult to God. So, God rebuked Cain...and Cain did not like it. And Cain began to seethe and Cain was filled up with jealousy and pettiness and instead of looking himself in the eye and asking God for forgiveness, Cain nursed his shame and fed his anger. And one day...

Genesis 4:8 (NIV) ⁸ ... Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

And on that day, Adam realized exactly how grotesque was his sin...not so much Cain's sin but his own! Adam probably looked upon his dead son Abel and thought of his murderous son Cain and all at once...Adam realized something. It was all his fault! Adam was a very bad Captain of humanity.

We may be clever enough to invent tractors and plows to make the hard ground easier to deal with...and we may be creative enough and smart enough to make childbirth less painful and cancer less harmful and...we may be clever enough to invent Advil so headaches are a minor problem! And we may be clever enough to do all of those things to offset the consequences of the fall into sin. We can fix the fields and we can fix the flesh... *but we cannot fix the human heart.* In that we are hopeless because the heart is corrupted beyond all understanding. I think that

was Adam's worst day. That day when his son Cain killed his son Abel was the day when he said to himself "I was just beginning to think we could work around the curse of God because we can fix all of the things that are broken. But we cannot fix the human heart. It lives not for God and for His glory...it lives not for him but for...itself. I made that happen. Can anyone fix that?" "

That is why we struggle and fight. That is why the world is undone with strife. When Adam fell the human heart was genetically damaged...I mean of course the soul and spirit of man became the seat of self-worship. And even in the church, the hearts of Christians are often so caught up in self that they cannot see their own folly and they cannot see how they grieve the Holy Spirit of God. How? When we do not serve with our gifts and skills because things are not being done our way. When we do not forgive because our egos have been offended. When we are petty and small and we gossip and find faults and live out our Christian faith clinging to salvation but treating sanctification with contempt. Then even redeemed we are like this first Adam...often living for self and not for God. Like Adam we are so proud that we cannot see how we hurt the very heart of God. We can soften the ground and we can make childbirth painless. But we cannot fix our hearts. Only God can fix our hearts and that's why from the moment of Adam's sin, God declared Advent...the Christ, the second and last Adam would come.

Some years back, a man in our church was in a damaged relationship with many people including Pastor Alberta. At one point, he expressed his frustration in that he was highly trained and had great leadership skills...but he was not asked to serve. Why? Because he was also highly proud and he did not like being under authority. I prayed about his heart attitude and looked for a way for God to deal with his heart. If he had a headache I could help him. But his heart was untouchable except by God.

One day I said "You want to serve. I may have a task for you. An important task." "What might that be" he asked? I said "There are many windows that need cleaning here at the church and the custodial team can't keep up. Would you like to spend a day scrubbing dirty windows for the Lord?" Oh, I knew very well that he could do greater things than that. He was trained to do bigger things but his heart attitude was proud. I can get people to clean windows but I cannot fix hearts. But God can. To his credit, the man came in and worked diligently on the windows and afterwards told me he felt good about doing so. And I began to see changes in that man's heart.

Advil fixes headaches but only God's Holy Spirit fixes hearts. And that was the good news for Adam. Unlike Captain Edwards who died never hearing good news

about a rescue, God spoke to the serpent, the Devil himself, and he did so with Adam standing by and listening. And I suspect that Adam knew that he had just heard the good news of Advent. Adam did not know to call it that and Adam did not know how it would work. But Advent is the promise from God fulfilled in the birth Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Adam listened as God spoke these words:

Genesis 3:14-15 (NIV) ¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ 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."

That was the first prophecy of Jesus and Advent. "...**he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**" Imagine the patience of God? How many generations waited for the Savior? How long was the Advent season really? What God was really saying to Adam after he fell into sin and brought on suffering and death was this: "This serpent who deceived you? I will deal with him. I will send the Last Adam...my son..and this serpent will strike him but my son will crush his head!" That was the good news for Adam. Advent began at that moment.

Little wonder we read these words of the Angel who spoke to Joseph who did not understand the pregnancy of his fiancé Mary:

Matthew 1:20-21 (NIV) ²⁰ "...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

And when we come to Jesus, we become children of the Last Adam...the new Adam...and we partake of Advent...the Good News first given to the first Adam. And we learn anew that Advil can fix our headaches but only Advent can fix our hearts. Let us pray.

