

dePolluting Creation “Clothed”

Genesis 3:7-11, 21

~ Delivered at DHBC on March 1, 2015

INTRODUCTION

- (SHOW SLIDE) Please open your Bibles to Genesis 3. **READ 6-11.**
 - *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid. ¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”*
- Karl Menninger was a world famous psychiatrist who died in 1990. He was not a Christian but he wrote a famous book called *Whatever Became of Sin?* It shocked a lot of people because he called for a revival of the concept of sin. Why do that? Won't people be more depressed if we tell them they are guilty of sin?
 - Menninger argued the opposite: *“The assumption that there is sin in it somewhere implies both a possibility and an obligation for intervention...Hence sin is the only hopeful view. When evil appears around us and no one is responsible and no one is guilty ... then no moral questions are asked, and then there is, in short, nothing to do, we sink to despairing helplessness. Therefore I say that the consequence of my proposal would not be more depression, but less. If the concept of personal responsibility and answerability for ourselves and for others were to return to common acceptance, hope would return to the world with it!”*¹

¹ Karl Menninger, *What Ever Became Of Sin?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 218-219. The entire quote is: “And what would be the good of that? someone asks. Do we need -more breast-beaters? Shall we add depression to the already mentioned gloom and world uneasiness? Why not a “no-fault” theology, equivalent to no-fault casualty insurance: no one to blame? Things just happen, alas? The assumption that there is sin in it somewhere implies both a possibility and an obligation for intervention. Presumably something is possible which can be reparative, corrective, meliorative, and that something involves me and mercy - we want them, too. But we want to think we can help ourselves and our fellows if only a modicum.

Hence sin is the only hopeful view. The present world miasma and depression are partly the result of our self-induced conviction that since sin has ceased to be, only the neurotics need to be treated and the criminals punished. The rest may stand around and read the newspapers. Or look at television. Do your thing and keep your eye on the road leading to the main chance.

As it is, vague, amorphous evil appears all about us, and when this or that awful thing is happening and this terrible thing goes on and that wretched circumstance has developed, and yet, withal, when no one is responsible, no one is guilty, no moral questions are asked, when there is, in short, just nothing to do, we sink to despairing helplessness. We wait from day to day for improvement, expectantly but not hopefully.

- So this world famous psychiatrist is saying that your mental health and happiness are directly tied to your understanding of sin. The Bible agrees. This is why we are going back to Genesis 3, which is the story of how sin came into the world.
 - We have looked at what sin is. Today we look at what sin does. We are looking at how it negatively affects us. This passage is so profound because it vividly shows you why you are often so unhappy, why you struggle in relationships, why you get exhausted from being a perfectionist, why you get depressed about your looks, why you tell little white lies, and why you have this driving need to prove yourself.
 - More importantly this passage also shows you how you can move toward more joy, more freedom, and possess a deep inner security no matter what is going on in life.
- As you can see all of this has to do with the themes of nakedness and clothing. So I am going to develop today's passage in three parts.
 - Part 1: The reality of our nakedness. Part 2: The inability to cover our nakedness. Part 3: The God who clothes our nakedness.²

THE REALITY OF OUR NAKEDNESS

- So let's begin with **(SHOW SLIDE)** the reality of our nakedness.
 - At one level this is a very simple passage to understand. Adam and Eve realize they are naked, they feel shame, and they try to cover themselves.
 - Look at verse 7. **READ 7** – *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”*
- There is much more going on though. We know this because they were naked *before* they ate the fruit and they were perfectly fine with this. Look back at chapter 2:25 it says, *“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”*
 - So it's not like they were physically blind and the fruit healed their eyes so that they suddenly said, *“Oh my goodness, we're naked. We'd better cover up.”*
 - No, they were already naked but now there is a new awareness of their nakedness.
- You see to be naked means to be fully known. This can positive or negative but it means to be known in a way that nothing is hidden. To be known in a way that is totally transparent.
 - Before they disobeyed Adam fully knew Eve and Eve fully knew Adam and they loved each other. This is what we all want. To be fully known and to be fully loved.

Therefore I say that the consequence of my proposal would not be more depression, but less. If the concept of personal responsibility and answerability for ourselves and for others were to return to common acceptance, hope would return to the world with it!”¹

² This sermon borrows thoughts and illustrations from a few sermons by Timothy Keller including, “Nakedness and the Holiness of God” (March 21, 1993), “Paradise Promised” (November 12, 2000), “East of Eden” (November 19, 2000), and “Made for Relationships” (October 29, 2000).

- But when Adam and Eve disobeyed everything changed. Rather than enjoying the intimacy of being known and loved they experience alienation on three levels.
 - First, they become psychologically alienated from their own selves. It says they “realized” they were naked. They suddenly felt in the core of their being that there was something wrong. This leads them to be socially alienated from each other. They cannot stand being exposed and so try to cover themselves from each other’s eyes. Third, they are spiritually alienated. They cannot stand being seen by God and so try to hide from him.
 - So nakedness means to be fully known but because of sin we fear to be fully known because we realize there is something wrong with us. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Nakedness then is the sense of being unacceptable or unpresentable.
- Think of the common nightmare where you are caught standing naked in front of a group of people. It is so traumatic because everyone can see all your flaws and imperfections but you cannot see theirs.
 - You feel an inner psychological sense of shame that makes you want to run and hide.

THE LOOK

- Let’s put it another way. Imagine you are in a room filled with T.V. screens. These screens are a live video feed from hidden cameras in someone else’s house – someone you know but don’t like very much. You get to watch all they do and listen to every conversation they have.
 - It is a rather intoxicating experience for you quickly see them for who they really are not who they present themselves to be. You listen to them get angry with their spouse and kids. You see all their secret habits. You know what they really look at on the computer and watch on their T.V. They are exposed and you know who they really are.
 - One day as you finish your breakfast and head back to watch the screens you see a spider in the corner of wall. Upon closer inspection you realize it is not a spider at all. It’s a tiny camera lens. Suddenly it dawns on you - someone is secretly looking at you. In a panic you search the house and find cameras in every room. You were the watcher but now you are the watched.³
- In that moment you are enraged. You feel violated and dehumanized. But why? There was a certain sense of delight in seeing the other person for who they really are. You saw behind the façade and saw their faults.
 - But now you are outraged when you are the one being watched. Why is that? Because now someone else knows who you really are. You have

³ This illustration inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: The Citadel Press, 1956), 235-236. Sartre uses the image of looking through a keyhole only to hear someone in the hallway behind him and realize he is being looked at through the keyhole.

been exposed. They have a power over you because, like in your nightmare, they know your flaws but you don't know theirs.

- This is why, like Adam and Eve, we are always seeking to control what people know of us. We only share so much. We put up facades. We filter things so we look better.
- But here is the point: the very fact that we try to control what people know about us is proof that there is something deeply wrong with us. You only hide when you have reason to do so.
 - Be honest, if all your thoughts and were displayed on a screen for all to see and hear would you not be totally embarrassed? You would be exposed for who you really are.
- The Bible is being so realistic then. It clears away all our denial and our efforts to control how we present ourselves and shows that in the core of who we are there is something wrong.
 - Genesis 3 says that all of this alienation is the result of sin. We have tried to be our own gods. When we turn away from our Creator and so we experience psychological alienation, which expresses itself in social alienation and ultimately in spiritual alienation.
 - This is the reality of our nakedness.

THE INABILITY TO CLOTHE OUR NAKEDNESS

- Let's turn to the second part of the message now and talk about **(SHOW SLIDE)** the inability to cover our nakedness.
 - Adam and Eve could not stand to be truly known and so they try to make themselves feel better by covering their nakedness.
 - Look at verse 7. **READ 7** – *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”*
 - If this were not so tragic it would be funny. Clearly fig leaves do a poor job of covering. Leaves rip and tear. They wither and die. They don't really protect the skin and I'm guessing they are kind of drafty.
 - Again though, this is not just about covering physical nakedness. It is about trying to cover that deeper inner sense that there is something wrong with them. This is clear because if it was just about physical nakedness then after they put on the fig leaves they should have felt secure and happy. Life should have gone back to normal.
 - But that is not the case is it? Note carefully that it is *after* they cover themselves that they feel fear and hide among the trees. Look at verse 8-10. **READ 8-10** – *“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’”*
 - So the Bible is teaching us something profound here: **(SHOW SLIDE)** we are always trying to cover up our deep inner sense of inadequacy.

- We cannot stand to look on ourselves as flawed and so we do things to try and make ourselves feel better. We also try to hide our flaws from others. You see, we want to be known *and* loved but we fear that if others really know us then they won't love us. So we try to control how much they know about us so they will still like us.⁴
 - But this passage is also showing us that **(SHOW SLIDE)** all our attempts at covering our nakedness are nothing more than fig leaves. They don't work.
- Let's work this out in real life. Think on the basic level of going out on a date. You pick out clothes that hide the bad parts of your body and make you look better. The woman puts on makeup. What is makeup but a literal covering of one's flaws? You can't let your date really know what you look like or they may not like you as much.
 - On a literal level, clothing and makeup are fig leaves that we use to try and cover our flaws. We use them to try and feel better about ourselves and to control what others know about us so they will like us.
- Let's go deeper. Why do you work so hard to be successful? Oh yes, it is to earn a living. But is it not also true that we want to be successful so we can feel that we are somebody and so other people will think of us as somebody?
 - Do you remember that old boxing movie *Rocky*? There is a part where Rocky is explaining to his girlfriend why he doesn't really even want to win. He just wants to make it through all the rounds and stay on his feet. Why? He says, ***"Then I'll know that I'm not a bum."***
 - So much of our efforts to achieve, to get degrees, and to succeed is so we can cover up that deep sense that there is something wrong with us. We want to prove to ourselves and others that we are not a bum.
 - Yet success is just a fig leaf. Oh yes, it covers a little but no amount of achievement, no amount of degrees, no amount of status, can fully cover that deep inner sense of inadequacy.
- Why do some of you care so much about your physical appearance? Why do you get depressed when you feel ugly? Is it not because you think, "If I am attractive then I have value in myself and others will like me?"
 - But this is just a fig leaf. You know this because, like a fig leaf, your physical beauty will literally wither and fade. It cannot cover you.
- Why do you tell little white lies?
 - Is it not to try and cover up areas where you are wrong and so others will think better of you. Lies are fig leaves.

⁴ Demi Moore is a famous actress. After she and Ashton Kutchner got divorced she confessed the following: "What scares me is that I'm going to ultimately find out at the end of my life that I'm not really loveable, that I'm not worthy of being loved, that there's something fundamentally wrong with me...the fight against gravity for me is to find that love for myself that gives me the courage to reach my fullest potential."⁴ Like all of us she craves to be loved but she is scared that that if people really knew her they would not love her. And so she says her whole life is an effort to fight that inner feeling of inadequacy and if she cannot cover it up then she cannot be loved.

- Or think about perfectionism. Perfectionists are trying so hard because they cannot stand to be viewed as inadequate or let other people down.
 - But this is a fig leaf because there is always more to do and it exhausts the person and everyone around them.
- Or think about world religions and spiritual paths. The Bible says they are all just fig leaves. They are human attempts to try and make ourselves presentable to the Divine. Religious people know they cannot present themselves to God and so they try to make up for it by doing all kinds of religious things.
 - But the Bible says all of these are fig leaves. “But I meditate!” Fig leaves. “But I go to church!” Fig leaves. “But I give my money away!” Fig leaves. “But I live a good moral life!” Fig leaves.
 - None of these things can cover our nakedness before God. We try to deny it and cover it up but there is something wrong with us. The Bible calls this something “sin.”
- It’s like the classic fairytale *Cinderella*. She is lives in rags and cannot go to the palace ball. The fairy godmother gives her a magical dress that covers her rags but it is really just a fig leaf.
 - When the clock begins to strike midnight the magic wears off and Cinderella has to flee the prince lest he see her for who she really is.
- So there you have it. The Bible traces all our problems back to sin. We know there is something wrong with us. Rather than admit our nakedness we try to cover it up in all manner of ways. Yet all these coverings are fig leaves.
 - So what should we do then? We’ve tried everything. Are we just doomed to putting on facades? Doomed to controlling what others see? Doomed to being unpresentable before God?
 - No, for it is like Menninger said, if sin is real then there is hope for intervention. And that is exactly what God did with Adam and Eve and what he wants to do with you right now.

THE GOD WHO CLOTHES OUR NAKEDNESS

- Having looked at the reality of our nakedness and our inability to cover our nakedness we are now ready for the happy news of the Bible. We will now look at **(SHOW SLIDE)** the God who clothes our nakedness.
 - In verse 7 Adam and Eve vainly try to cover themselves. In verse 21 they receive the covering of another. **READ 21 – “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”**
 - What a gracious God! God saw right through their fig leaves. He knows them and what they did. And yet he does not hurt them. Rather, he clothes them. God is here saying, **“I and I alone can clothe your nakedness.”**
- But the clothing God provided was different than what they expected. Their sin could not be covered by a handful of leaves. Their sin could only be covered by pain and blood. This clothing required the death of an animal for notice they were garments made of skin. A life had to be taken in order for them to be clothed. There was no easy way to restore what was lost.

- God would develop this concept into the sacrificial system. The Israelite people would sacrifice a lamb and God would cover their sins.
 - Again though, it is God alone who can cover sin and this covering costs a life.
- How shocking then when John the Baptist saw Jesus he cried out, ***“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*** A man will be the sacrifice? Yes. This one sacrifice can take away all sin? Yes.
 - You see, Jesus came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We cannot cover our sin. But Jesus was stripped naked for us. He was exposed for all to see. He bore our shame. He was sacrificed on the cross. His blood was shed. His life was taken.
 - So here is what Christianity offers you. First, that Jesus will cleanse your soul of all sin. Second, he will then clothe you in his own righteousness.
- Just as the prince went out in search of the ragged clothed Cinderella, Jesus went out in search of you. Just as the prince took away her rags, Jesus takes away the rags of your sin. Just as the prince took her as his bride, so Jesus takes us as his bride. Just as she was clothed as a bride and so was forever welcome in the palace, Jesus clothes us in his righteousness so we are forever welcome in God’s presence.
 - Listen, God knows you. His eyes see all of who you are. As Hebrews 4:13 says, ***“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*** In one sense this is terrifying for if he knows us so fully, will he not reject us? Other people do.
 - But God did not. Just as he sought out Adam and Eve and clothed them, so also he gave the life of his own Son that we might be presentable to him. Listen, God knows you and he loves you.
- I will never forget one evening when we were camping in Oregon. As I sat in my lawn chair watching the sun go down, I was overwhelmed with my own sin. I felt the eyes of God. I felt exposed. I felt shame. Like Adam and Eve I could feel my soul shrinking back from God.
 - And then with soul soothing tenderness God spoke the words of Hebrews 2:12 to me where it says of Jesus that, ***“He is not ashamed to call us brothers.”*** What hope! God knows me. I am naked before him. And yet he is not ashamed of me.
- This is why we sing,
 - ***My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.***
- This is why we sing,
 - ***When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.***
- This is why we sing,
 - ***When Satan tempts me to despair***

*And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me*

- This is why we sing,
 - *No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*
- So you see our passage is telling us that **(SHOW SLIDE)** when we receive the clothing God offers (the righteousness of Jesus) we possess a deep inner security. For listen if God knows you and loves you then it changes everything about how you relate to yourself and others.
 - When you are clothed with Jesus' righteousness you can work hard and achieve but you no longer have to do it to try and be somebody. In Jesus you are fully known and fully loved. You are somebody.
 - You are free from having to live by the opinions of others because the only opinion that really matters has seen the darkest parts of your heart and loved you to the point of death.
 - You are free from having to base your self-worth on how attractive you are because dressed in Jesus' robes you are stunningly beautiful to God.
 - Listen Cinderella, you don't need to fear. You don't need to be so anxious. Remember who you are now. You are the bride of Jesus. You are clothed in his righteousness. You are known and loved.
- Drop the fig leaves. Come out from the behind the tree. Stop hiding from God. He sees through your fig leaves anyways.
 - Admit that you need Jesus to take away your sin and clothe you in his righteousness. Receive his gift and then rest in the deep assurance that God knows you and love you

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