

“The Hint of a Rescue”

Kevin Watkins

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American author Brad Meltzer once wrote, “Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.”

This battle may be mental health or physical health. It may be to overcome addiction or to overcome the harm done to them. It may be to accept forgiveness or to wait without knowing the outcome. A battle to love themselves or love other people when they don't deserve it. A battle to believe good things about God when their experience makes that difficult. I don't know if it is true of everyone, but over and over again I have found that as I sit with people and listen, that almost everyone is fighting a battle that goes largely unnoticed.

Life is hard. Relationships are hard. Work is hard.

This fall, we are studying Jesus in the Old Testament. Last week, we studied Genesis 1 and 2 and saw Jesus in creation. Jesus created us to be his family, to be like him, to rule with him, and everything, everything was very good. God loved creation and it worked beautifully.

So how did we get here? Things are not working beautifully.

The claim of Genesis 1&2 that God made the earth and made it beautiful and good is almost indefensible given the pain so many will experience today. This is not the world of human flourishing and goodness that God designed. Just watch the news for 5 minutes and that will be obvious. So we look again for Jesus in the Old Testament, in a world damaged by evil and we find him in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, but you have to know that it isn't just a story. This is real life, this is my story, this is your story. Genesis 3 starts like this

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

Let's start by acknowledging the absurd, a serpent is talking. What? That is strange. But don't check out, there is something for us to learn here. This serpent is a representation of evil. And evil did not come in big obvious ways. There are no red horns and a pitchfork. There is no scythe and black cloak. There is only a small snake in a world filled with animals. And it does not come with a megaphone, but with a quiet question, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

For context, Genesis 2:16-17 says, *And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*

So “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

No he didn't say anything like that. He said you can eat from any tree on the whole planet, except one. They had a feast set before them. Jesus is extravagant with his provision, above and beyond the basic nutrition. There is abundance. But the woman said...

2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

There is truth in Eve’s response, but also God never said anything about touching. Maybe it is because she wasn’t there when God gave Adam all that food or maybe she is starting to feel a lack of gratitude. The serpent’s question has begun to deceive her. God’s goodness & provision is starting to shrink. Whatever the reason, she envisions restrictions that aren’t there.

This same thing happens today. How many people think of life with God as restrictive and incomplete? God is stingy. There is a whole world out there to experience and I cannot be restricted by following Jesus. Which is the exact opposite of reality. To spend our lives doing whatever we want apart from God is what the New Testament calls slavery, slavery to sin. We actually become enslaved to our desires for power, money, adrenaline, sex, and fame. It is actually in following Jesus that one becomes really free, as Paul puts in Galatians 5, when we live Jesus’ way, we keep in step with the Spirit, we experience love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

When you live with God and His Spirit is in you, you have love and joy and goodness and kindness and you can do however much of them that you want.

But instead we are tempted to see God as stingy and his way of life as restrictive. Then this

4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

God is lying. You won’t die. You will be like God. God is keeping you from your best life now. Imagine, you will be just like God.

Here is the twisted thing: they WERE like God. The man and the woman were made like God, even having a God-like role on earth. They are not lacking in God-likeness. Neither are you, neither am I. But we believe a new lie: God is not good. He doesn’t love us. We can’t trust him. We are missing out on life. So they misuse their Godlikeness and decide for themselves what is right and best, and what is wrong and bad.

6 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.

In Genesis 2:9, we learn that God intentionally made all kinds of trees with fruit that were good for food and pleasing to the eye. Beauty and food are good things, even gaining wisdom is a good thing. But beauty, food, & wisdom are good things, but not more good than God.

In this moment, Eve’s strongest desires were for beauty, good food, and wisdom. But as one of my favorite authors, John Mark Comer, wrote, “Often our strongest desires are not actually our deepest desires.”

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What she feels the strongest desire for in that moment is not actually what she most needs. She wants the fruit, the beauty, the knowledge, but what she needs is God, to be with him, to be like Him, to obey Him. She needs this way more than she needs the fruit.

And then this haunting detail. Adam has been with the woman the whole time. Why didn't he say something? Do something? As the common phrase goes, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." And that was what happened. When Adam's mate, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, was turning her back on God, he did nothing. Even worse, he participated. She was made to be a helper for him when she needed help he wasn't there for her. That is not love.

They take the fruit and reject God. When you reject someone you are harming and severing your connection with them. They severed their connection to God, what they needed most in the world, and as a result all of creation is thrown into disarray.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, & they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together & made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man & his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, & they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

They hid their bodies from each other with leaves and hid from God behind trees. No one had ever done that before. They were fully known by God and another person. There was no shame, isolation, loneliness, or disconnection. Imagine loving your body and not having to protect yourself from other people. I was thinking about how we hide from each other – not just clothes or fig leaves – but we hide in other ways. No one can hurt me if I don't let them get close. We're passive aggressive, to protect ourselves. Others of us are just aggressive or sarcastic. No one can hurt you if you steamroll them first. Sometimes, we project an image. We don't always show people who we are, instead we show them who we wish we were.

And we hide from God, not behind a tree, that is silly. We are much more sophisticated. We hide behind a screen or a glass of wine. We avoid God and the daily bids God makes for our attention by filling up our schedules to the max. God will often meet us in moments of quiet and stillness. So we avoid these at all costs. I don't have to think about my bad choices if I never stop moving. Someone told me this week, they know they are avoiding God when they scroll past Christian posts on Instagram. They are on Instagram or tiktok to avoid God. We hide from God.

9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, & 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?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, & I ate it." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, & I ate."

Here is the turn in the passage. God comes to find them. God is not conflict avoidant. God is not an angry parent that avoids his kids when he is mad. God loves them too much to let them hide. It is the same for us. God loves us too much to let us hide from him. CS Lewis famously referred to God as the Hound of Heaven, a title of a poem written in 1890 by Francis Thompson. God is seeking us out.

The whole rest of the bible could be described as the story of people hiding from God and God working to reveal himself to mankind, first through the family of Israel and ultimately in Jesus' incarnation. God is not as we might think hard to find. God is not hiding, but we are. Will we let ourselves be found by God?

When Adam and Eve could not hide from God, they switched to blaming. She made me do it. The serpent made me do it. But no amount of hiding and blame shifting could keep the consequences of their choices away.

First the serpent is cursed.

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock & all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly & you will eat dust all the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity between you & the woman, & between your offspring & hers; he will crush your head, & you will strike his heel."

This is about more than snakes losing their legs. It is here that we see a hint of the rescue that will come in Jesus. This says that evil and the woman will have offspring and one day there will be a conflict and the woman's seed will crush evil, even as he is wounded. This is Jesus. Jesus does just that. As Pastor Paul said so well this week, Jesus has always been the plan. He defeats the power of sin, death, and evil on the cross, even as it kills him. This passage is often referred to as the first gospel message in the bible. This is the first hint of a rescue.

And we need a rescue. Things are not as they should be.

16 To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, & he will rule over you."

The woman is not cursed, but her role in the command to be fruitful and multiply got much more difficult. Not only that, woman, your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you. The woman was made to co-rule over creation together with the man, and instead he will be unavailable to her, too concerned with getting his way and as a matter of historical fact, this happened. Men have ruled over women instead of with them. Lord have mercy.

Adam is also not cursed. It is as if God cannot bring himself to curse his beloved. Mankind is not cursed, but the land is. The extravagant feast of the garden is replaced with thorns and thistles. Creation is cursed. Work which was good, was replaced with painful toil. Earth was our home and now it is a hard place. And then this

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 & to dust you will return."

Death is now here. Adam and Eve in this story, now know evil. It is more than knowing the difference between good and evil. I think they always knew good from evil. The problem is once we know things, we do them. Humans do great things. But we've done terrible and horrible things. Last century, more people died than any before, thanks to napalm and nuclear weapons. We've perfected our ability to kill and destroy others. I was talking to school teachers and the way kids can bully and hurt each other online is getting worse. You can hurt people faster with the internet.

We get good at doing evil. If you are married, you know exactly how to hurt your spouse. Same goes with a good friend. It is often the ones we love the most that we hurt the most. Things are not getting better. We are just getting better at doing evil.

So death is introduced. Human beings were meant to live forever with God. Adam and Eve were to eat from the tree of life, but not after their disobedience. Because the only thing worse than someone good at doing evil is someone good at doing evil who lives forever. Death restrained us from being immortal evildoers.

But let's be clear, death is no friend. Not the plan, not our friend. Death is not poetic. It is bad. It is our enemy.

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. 21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam & his wife & clothed them. 22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good & evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand & take also from the tree of life & eat, & live forever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim & a flaming sword flashing back & forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Finally, here again we see foreshadows of a rescue. In v.21, God covers their shame and frailty with garments of skin. He covered their shame, but it came with a cost. Something had to die so that their shame may be covered. This is seen most fully again in Jesus, who dies to cover our sin and shame.

Then this line, "He must not be allowed to reach out his hand & take also from the tree of life & eat, & live forever." Or "We can't let them live like this forever." Oh the foreshadowing.

The story of Genesis 3 is our story. It is not just Adam and Eve who believe lies about God, who do things they know are wrong, hide, blame other people, and live outside of paradise, East of Eden. Everyone is fighting a battle. This is our story.

It is also true that God is seeking us. Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil on the cross and our sin and shame have been covered by Jesus. We have been or could be rescued by Jesus, if we will let him.

So where does that leave us this morning?

A few small practices that might help you actively respond to this text.

First, take 5-10 minutes and honestly answer the questions, "Where does following Jesus feel restrictive? What do I feel like I'm missing out on?" The fear of missing out goes way back to the beginning. This might be around money, sexuality, or power. Remember, "Often our strongest desires are not actually our deepest desires." What desires do you feel stronger than for Jesus and His way of life?

Another question is "What sin has become a normal part of your life?" I was reminded this week that Jesus said that if you call someone a fool, it is as if you have murdered them. I wish that wasn't true. Or unforgiveness or jealousy or lust or gossip. Or your sin may be Adam's sin, the sin of not doing the good you should do. What act of love have you regularly avoided? What do you need, what do I need to be rescued from?

Finally, Spend intentional time in quiet and stillness. I believe God is pursuing us and if we will let him catch us, usually through moments of silence, solitude, and stillness, we will meet with God. Remember we run from God, God is not running from us. I have small kids. I am extremely extroverted and I own an iPhone. It is easy to avoid silence. But this week, maybe don't turn on the radio in the car. Go on a walk or a run without a podcast. Turn off the TV that you have on in the background at all times. And invite God to talk to you and see what happens. Let yourself be found by God.

Let's pray.