

Genesis 3:1-24
Psalm 1
Revelation 12

“Whose Voice?”

March 22, 2009

“Who told you?”

Whose voice matters most to you?

At the heart of Eve’s sin is her listening to the voice of the serpent,
rather than listening to the voice of God.

At the heart of Adam’s sin is his listening to the voice of his wife,
rather than listening to the voice of God.

And through the long history of God’s dealing with his people,
this has remained our central problem.

Who told you?

Whose voice matters most to you?

To whom do you listen?

There are so many voices competing for our attention.

This is why we are singing Psalm 1.

Even as there are five books of Moses,
so also there are five books of the Psalms.

And as the first book of Moses begins with a tree planted by streams of water –
and a question of “whose voice?”

So also the first book of David begins with a tree planted by streams of water –
and a question of “whose voice?”

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Because the blessed man listens to the voice of God:

*He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

The blessed man does not listen to the voice of the wicked.

If Adam had delighted in the law of the LORD he would have been blessed.

But Adam and Eve listened to the voice of scoffers.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

And when judgment day came for Adam and Eve,
they did not stand.
They ran and hid!

And we, like Adam and Eve, have too often listened to the voice of the serpent.
We have walked in the counsel of the wicked.
We have stood in the way of sinners.
We have sat in the seat of scoffers.

And that is why we need to sing Psalm 1 as a song of the Messiah.
Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Seed of the Woman, the Second Adam,
is the blessed man who has listened to the voice of God,
and delighted in the Law of the LORD.

So let us sing Psalm 1!

Introduction: the Serpent and the Dragon

In Revelation 12-13 we hear of the counterfeit trinity:
the Dragon and his two beasts.

In Revelation 12 the Dragon is called “that ancient serpent,
who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (12:9),
clearly identifying the Dragon with the serpent of Genesis 3.

And he is pursuing a pregnant woman,
seeking to devour her seed because he knows the prophesy of Gen 3:15
that her seed will crush the head of the serpent.

Last time we saw that what Eve does to help is bear children.
She is a picture of the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother,
who gave birth to Jesus –
the seed of the woman who crushes the serpent’s head –
and then also to us – “the rest of her offspring...
who keep the commandments of God
and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” (12:17)

1. The Serpent Said: Counterfeit Life and Wisdom (3:1-5)

In the ancient near east (and especially in Egypt)
serpents were often viewed as symbols of life and wisdom.
And so it is not entirely surprising that the Tempter took the form of a serpent.

Because the serpent comes to Eve offering her a counterfeit life and wisdom
(which results in death and folly).

There is a word play going on in the Hebrew.

At the end of chapter 2 we heard that the man and his wife were naked (“arummim”).
and in 3:1 we hear that the serpent was crafty (“arum”).

This word can be translated either “prudent” or “crafty”
depending on whether it is intended positively or negatively.
Perhaps the best translation is “clever” –
since the English word clever can be used positively,
“what a clever little boy!”
(of the four year old who just figured out how to tie his shoes)
or on the other hand,
“what a clever little boy!”
(of the four year old who just figured out how to get into the cookie jar)

The serpent is “clever,” “crafty,” “shrewd” –
a purveyor of ambiguities that twists words into contorted shapes.

And so while in 2:25 Adam and Eve were naked “arum” and unashamed –
by 3:7-11 they will be naked “erom” – a different word formed on the same root –
all because of the “arum” (craftiness) of the serpent.

This word for “shameful” nakedness is also used in Deuteronomy 28:48
where Israel is warned that if they rebel against the LORD,
they will serve their enemies “in nakedness.”

In other words, the five books of Moses begin with a naked Adam in the Land of blessing.
He falls into sin and his nakedness becomes shameful –
as he listens to the voice of the tempter and is subdued by his enemies.
And the five books of Moses end with Israel on the verge of the Land of blessing,
and called to succeed where Adam failed,
and warned that if they rebel, they will be subdued to nakedness by their enemies.

And perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised, then, to hear that Jesus, as he went to the cross,
was stripped naked by his enemies...

Ever since the fall, clothing has signified power – nakedness has signified impotence.
What you wear says something about who you are.
Adam and Eve will clothe themselves with fig leaves –
trying to cover their shame (their sin) by their own work.
But God will clothe them in animal skins –
demonstrating that only God can cover our sin and shame
(and that the shedding of blood is necessary –
death is necessary to cover sin).

But the serpent is crafty – a master of indirect speech.
He does not tell Eve that she is naked.
Neither does he call her to bow down to him.
He takes a clever and crafty approach.

He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?
He sets her up by asking an easy question.
Of course, this is not what God said.

*And the woman said to the serpent,
We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,
but God said,
You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden,
neither shall you touch it, lest you die.*

Eve here takes the common route of amplifying what God said,
and adding extra prohibitions in order to avoid sin.
God had said nothing about “touching” the fruit.

*But the serpent said to the woman,
You will not surely die.
For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*

The serpent offers counterfeit wisdom and life.
And he does so by twisting the truth.
It is true: God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

The serpent tells the truth!
But he tells the truth with ambiguity:
“you will not surely die”
or
“you will surely not die”

Now it is interesting to note that the “you” in all of this is plural.
The serpent is addressing Eve as you plural –
as all humanity.
And in Hebrew the you plural is masculine!
(In Hebrew when you address an audience of both males and females
you use the masculine plural).
So the serpent is not saying that *Eve alone* will be like God,
but rather that all humanity will be like God.

It makes you start to wonder – where is Adam in all this?

And what is Eve to do in the face of this clever counterfeiter?
What is wrong with wanting wisdom?
What is wrong with seeking the knowledge of good and evil?
God made humanity in his own image and likeness –
what is wrong with being like God?
Isn't this a good thing?

It all depends.

It all depends on whose voice you are listening to!
Are you listening to God?
Or are their other voices (clever voices) that matter more?
Because counterfeit wisdom always *sounds* wise.

How do you know whose voice to follow?
Listen to the word of God!
Listen to what God says!

But the serpent only claims to “interpret” what God has said!
There will always be voices that sound plausible –
that simply claim to “interpret” what God has said.

What should you do with plausible-sounding words?
Test them according to the Word of God!
This is why I preach the way I do.
I want you to know the Word of God.
There are lots of voices out there saying “God says this” “God says that”
I expound the scriptures and focus on what the text *says*,
because I believe that if you understand the scriptures,
you will be able to discern true wisdom from its plausible counterfeits.

2. The Woman Saw: The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (3:6-7)

In verses 1-5 the emphasis was on verbs of saying:

The serpent *said*, did God *say*,
and the woman *said*, but God *said*.
Saying and knowing were the operative themes.

But now in verses 6-7 the emphasis is on seeing:
the woman saw...it was a delight to the eyes...and their eyes were opened

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,
and that it was a delight to the eyes,
and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,
she took of its fruit and ate,
and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

We need to stop for a moment and talk about this tree.

We heard in 2:9 that there are *two* trees in the midst of the garden.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life.

What are these trees doing here?

First, we should make it clear that these trees are not “magical” trees.

There is nothing in the fruit of these trees that automatically confers anything.

A fruitfly that sucked on the fruit of the tree of life
would not thereby live forever.

A worm that burrowed into the fruit of the tree
of the knowledge of good and evil
would not thereby gain any special knowledge.

These are *sacramental* trees.

Their blessings (or curses) only come about through the word and promise of God.

And we should note that God forbids only one tree.

Adam and Eve may eat of every tree of the garden (including the tree of life).

The *only* exception is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It is entirely possible that they ate of the tree of life while they were in the garden.

Because the tree of life does not confer immortality in a magical way.

Rather, as the very idea of “eating” suggests,

as long as Adam partook of the sacrament of life (the tree of life)
in a worthy manner,

he would continue in fellowship with God.

And that is why God will remove him from the garden after the fall.

If Adam continues to partake of the tree of life (the sacrament of life)

while he is under the curse of death,

(in other words, if he partakes unworthily)

then he will fall under a still greater judgment.

This is still true today.

We partake of the sacrament of life in the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus is the tree of life and by partaking of him we partake of that tree.

You can see how Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11

is rooted in God’s warning in Genesis 3:

the one who partakes unworthily of the sacrament of life
eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

But we have to ask:

Why does God test Adam in this way?

Why does God plant a forbidden tree in the Garden?

Remember that God has called Adam to work and keep the Garden.

Adam is God's vicegerent.

Adam is God's image – the king who rules over all the creatures.

God is testing Adam.

Will Adam obey him in all things?

And so he places the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden
and says do not eat of this tree.

What is interesting is that throughout the scriptures,
the knowledge of good and evil is considered essential for rulers.

The wise woman of Tekoa says to David in 2 Samuel 14,

“my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil.”

Solomon prays in 1 Kings 3 for wisdom

“that I may discern between good and evil.”

And in several places little children are described as those

who cannot discern between good and evil (e.g., Isaiah 7, Dt 1).

So the knowledge of good and evil is a desirable thing.

For that matter, it is an important thing for one who is to rule!

So Adam is called to rule, to work, and to guard,

but God denies him something that would be useful!

Why?

Because there is something else that Adam must learn *first*.

I think that there is a definite implication

that Adam *would have* been given permission to eat of this tree
if he had passed the test!

What test is that?

What is the thing that Adam had to learn first?

Well, what is the beginning of wisdom?

What is the beginning of knowledge?

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,

and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Prov 9:10).

What you need to learn, O Adam, is the necessity of listening to the voice of God.

Knowledge is power.

You see that as Adam goes on to name all the creatures,
thereby demonstrating his power and authority over the creatures.
Whatever he names it, that was its name!

But you can only exercise knowledge properly if you fear God.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

Even Adam needed to learn that.

So Adam has been placed in the land of life – the Holy of Holies that God himself made.
But in the day that you do not listen to the voice of the LORD,
you shall surely die.

We need to hear that too.
Adam's sin was that he listened to other voices.
All sin arises from this same root.

Whose voice matters most to you?
The chorus of the world, the flesh and the devil
who would draw you away from your calling before God?
Or the Word of God that calls you to deny yourself,
take up your cross, and follow Jesus?

Israel could not help but hear this in the context of what God had said to them:
they had been brought to the land of life and blessing,
and they were called to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation,
who would live in the land of blessing
only so long as they walked faithfully before God.

In other words, Israel was called to succeed where Adam failed.

But now Eve has listened to the voice of the serpent,
and she sees that the fruit is to be desired.
So she takes and eats,
and she gives it to her husband who was with her.

There is so much that we would like to know!
Was Adam actually standing there, listening to this conversation?
While the text does not say so explicitly,
that is exactly what it implies.

Adam was called to work and to guard the garden.
But when the enemy enters, he stands by and says and does nothing.

Eve may have been gullible and foolish –
but Adam has no such excuse.

Paul will say that the woman was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14).
But Adam was not deceived.
He knew exactly what he was doing – and did it anyway!

God will condemn Adam for “listening to the voice of your wife.”

Whose voice rules you?
What matters more to you?
What God says?
Or what your wife says?

3. The Man: Playing Hide and Seek with God (3:8-13)

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,
and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God
among the trees of the garden.*

And as they are covering themselves –
hiding themselves from one another –
they hear the voice of the LORD
and they hide.

The game of “hide and seek” is both physical and psychological.

But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, Where are you?

And the voice of the LORD lays bare their hiding place.
They do not try to run.
You cannot hide from God forever.

But while their physical hiding place is uncovered,
they still seek to hide their hearts from his gaze.

*And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden,
and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.*

He said, Who told you that you were naked?

Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?

*The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me,
she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.*

Then the LORD God said to the woman, What is this that you have done?

The woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate.

This is not only the first sin.
It is also the archetypal sin.
And in many ways every subsequent sin shares in this one.

Sin is always rooted in deception.
Why do I say that?

Because sin *always* promises something good.
Here sin promises wisdom and life.
Temptation always takes something good as its object
and offers a shortcut, an “easier” way, a desirable outcome.
But sin and temptation are *always rooted in a lie*.

“Has God said...?”

And so one question to ask of the sins that ensnare us is:
“what lie am I believing?”

The voice of the LORD strips away the plausible pretences that we advance:
“it’s her fault!”

How often do you blame your wife or your husband for your current situation?
“If only she didn’t...”
“If only he would have...”

Where is the lie there?
The fact that Eve sinned did not mean that Adam had to join in her sin!
(And what is more, Adam failed to guard the sanctuary!
He allowed the serpent to speak blasphemy.
He should have crushed the serpent’s head right then and there!)

Too often we fail to admit our own fault.
We shift the blame to someone else.
It’s not my fault!
(And what is worse, Adam even implies that God is somehow to blame:
“the woman whom you gave to be with me”)

And we haven’t changed!
We blame our sin on circumstances:
“he hit me first!”
“she made me mad!”
“I just threw the gold into the fire, and out came this calf!”
It’s not my fault!

We’ll look next time at what God does about this.
But our hymn of response tells us the end of the story.
As sin entered the world through the first man eating of a tree,
so also it was fitting that the second Adam would repair his fault
through a second tree.

Let us sing #180, “Sing, My Tongue, How Glorious Battle glorious victory became!”