

Genesis 3:16-20

From Dust to Dust

5/14/17

To the woman he said,

*“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”*

¹⁷ And 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;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

*¹⁹ By 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.”*

*²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.
(Pastor prays)*

What a passage to land on for Mother's Day!

Probably the most redeeming section of this passage is at the end in verse 20, "*The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.*" That tells us that although the man and woman deserved to die, they wouldn't die immediately and, not only that, they would have children and life would continue, albeit a life under the curse.

I mean that's what this passage is *here* for: to remind us that sin has consequences, that sin and disobedience do not go unchecked and unchallenged and in this section the camera turns its attention on the man.

The woman's sin was bad, showing us that without Christ, the two driving factors of parenthood and marriage are hopeless and doomed. The woman's sin was bad but in some ways the man's sin seemed worse. The woman at least had to be tricked into sin. Not the man. The man wasn't deceived like the woman. The man made a conscious decision to willingly disobey. He chose the voice of his wife over the word of God.

Adam knew what God had said. There was no deception or trick played on Adam. There was no ignorance, no confusion. There were no subtitles. Adam just flat out disobeyed. She wanted the fruit; he wanted to please her. So he did it. Now listen, according to what God had told Adam in Gen 2:17: "*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" In other words, Adam deserved to die on the spot. This should reframe our questions about God. Often you hear people ask, "What kind of God kills people or sends people to Hell?" when, according to this passage, a better question might be, "What kind of God lets people live or takes anybody to Heaven?" The question isn't "Why do people die?" The question is "Why do people live?"

Anyone who sins deserves to die, but God has mercy and, in Christ, He offers life. And that tumble into sin finds its terrible start right here in Genesis 3. The curse here on the man will affect all posterity, every generation. The curse is God withdrawing His divine favor and making His judgment on sin like a flood that will overflow all the parts of the earth, so that regardless of who you are or where you live or when you are born, the very earth itself reminds us of the atrocity of sin, the finality of death and the need for a savior. The fallen planet reminds us what life without Christ is really like. And the curse placed on Adam is there as a statement of the futility of life outside the fellowship of God.

Without Christ Life is Cursed

Before I get to the point, let me show you a couple of things in the text. The curse of Adam has three basic parts: 1) The ground is cursed. Before the curse, it produced fruit and every good plant in abundance, without any trouble; 2) Adam is condemned by the sweat of his brow. Before, Adam was placed in the garden to work there and the work would be a pleasure. But now that work is troublesome. The work is still good but now it comes at a cost; 3) There is now decreed an end to life. Verse 19 shows us "dust to dust." These three curses tell us life is filled with pain and sorrow. We work hard and it taxes our bodies and minds. It only gets worse and then we die. And that is the totality of life without Christ.

Without Christ, Work is Deadly

Work – we are created at least in part with work in mind. From the very beginning, before sin poisoned the well, Genesis 2:15 says, *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.* Having responsibility and doing productive labor have always been right. It's part of creation. That's why laziness is such a sin and a defilement of the image of God in you. It's why, even today, we respect a hard-working person who does a good job, provides for his/her family and accepts responsibility. But since sin has entered the world; work now comes at a cost and takes a heavy toll.

Verse 17 says, *cursed is the ground because of you and in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;* Pain is trouble, fatigue, stress, burnout, worry, pressures, dullness. You may be look over, terminated, phased out, forced to retire. The work becomes a meat grinder that takes the best of who you are and wears you down so that you feel like you are used and then discarded.

All of that is found in verse 17. In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life so that, if you are not careful, work becomes the god you worship and the devil that destroys you. This curse is here to show us how enslaved we can become in work and how we need a liberator. We need a savior so that when you come to Christ or, better said, when He comes to you and redeems you, He does so on the merits of His perfect life.

He was tempted in every way and resisted and kept God's law perfectly. And He has redeemed every part of life including work so that work, although still hard, becomes a

means of sanctification instead of the scene of your destruction. Work, then, is no longer a punishment for an *enemy* of God. Work is a discipline for a *child* of God.

There is a difference between punishment and discipline. Punishment is punitive. It's what the curse is and that is there without Christ. But Christ took punishment for sin on the cross in the place of His people. Now the difficulties of life, including work, are there as a means of discipline so that you are made more and more into the image of God through difficulties. It's what Paul had in mind when he said in Romans 8:17, *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

There is plenty to discipline and point us to Christ. Pain in verse 17, thorns and thistles in verse 18. In verse 19, it's the sweat of your face. This is here so that the natural world reminds us of a creator and the judgment of the creator. It's interesting to me that in verse 18 God tells the man, *thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.* God put every thorn and splinter and yellow jacket nest on earth to remind man of sin. Thorns remind us that thorns pierced the brow of Jesus so that He became sin. He became a curse so that we might be forgiven.

In verse 19, the sweat of the brow is there to remind us, as we work and long for the end of the day or for the weekend, that's there to teach us to long for salvation for the rest you will find in Christ.

And the futility of work is there to remind us of the emptiness of life without Christ. Listen how hopeless life actually is without Christ in verse 19, *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, til you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*"

You are dust, a speck in the universe of time. Here for a micro-second and then gone. That fact alone, that you are dust and to dust you shall return, points us to the astounding grace of God, that He would choose to save men and women, boys and girls, and do so not because of anything good in us (He knows our frame. He remembers we are dust), but because He is gracious and good, patient and kind.

God the Father planned to save His people. God the son, lived perfectly, died sacrificially and rose again miraculously to redeem His people, and God the Holy Spirit

moves in His people to cause us to believe. You are created in the image of God. Sin has disfigured that image and separated you from God. Life without Christ is miserable. Christ died miserably on the cross in the place of sinners. God raised Him from the dead.

Confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord. Believe God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved. He knows your frame, he remembers you are dust. By grace, He will save you.

(Pastor prays)