

## **The Story of Us**

March 9, 2014

### **Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

READ Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

A lot of comedy is based on finding humor in everyday situations. The clever comedian can see people doing ordinary things and getting unusual results or may see people doing something really dumb and causing funny things to happen. That was the premise for the TV show “America's Funniest Home Videos” - ordinary people doing really dumb things and getting caught because somebody was there with a video camera. These things are really funny until they show somebody doing something that looks so obviously dumb on TV but midway through the scene you realize that it was something you had done yourself. We may laugh along to cover up the fact that we did not tell our wives about the favorite pot we burned when we forgot about the chili we supposed to stir – and then cleaned it using the wire brush attachment on the electric drill. These so-called funny things get personal when the studio audience for the TV show is laughing hysterically at something you have done or tried to do.

We may get that same kind of feeling when we hear this story about Adam and Eve. We would like to sit back and sort of make fun of them for being such easy pickings for temptation. We would like to ask Eve “Did you not find anything odd about a talking snake?” We would like to say to Adam “What part of 'do not eat that fruit' did you not understand?” But when we think about the temptations that we have fallen for, and the sin we have committed as a result, it becomes harder to make fun of Adam and Eve. It does not take us very long to name a sin ourselves that, as we look back on it, was as obviously wrong as listening to a talking snake and as simple to identify as sin as eating the wrong fruit. Then we begin to squirm a little when people get on Adam and Eve for being gullible and weak. That's when we begin to realize that this story is not just about Adam and Eve and their response to temptation – it is a story about us. It is a story about us because the fundamentals of temptation for Adam and Eve are still applicable to us.

The first fundamental of temptation that is demonstrated in this story is that God

created us with the ability and the freedom to choose. That was part of humankind being made in God's image – not in His physical image but as thinking, feeling, choosing beings. Eve could have chosen to smack the snake with a stick – which is my primary impulse with a snake – but she chose instead to listen. Adam could have chosen to turn down Eve's offer, but he chose instead to eat.

We may sometimes want to argue that we did not understand the choices we were making. We want to defend ourselves by arguing that the rules were too complicated and we just cannot figure out what God's standards are. If we are making that argument, it is because we are not paying attention or are willfully ignoring God, because the standards are here in black and white. This situation with Adam and Eve was painfully simple - “Do not eat that fruit” - and Eve even repeated it when confronted by the serpent. She had no doubt that this was God's standard, and no doubt what the standard required. Every temptation is not this clear, but the answers are just as clear if we consult the right authority, and do one of those things that beings created in God's image have the power to do: Think. Think before we act or respond. Think about how what we do affects our relationship with God. Think about how what we do affects our relationships with each other. God will guide that thinking if we choose to let Him. Listen to how Isaiah talked about that promise.

### **READ Isaiah 30:19-21**

We often give thanks to God in our prayers that He does not leave us to fend for ourselves. And when it comes to choosing to succumb or not to temptation, the bottom line is this: God has standards, they are clearly revealed to all who are listening, and we choose to follow them or not. Pretty simple.

The second fundamental of temptation that is just as applicable to us as it was to them is that temptation looks good. We are unlikely to be tempted by an offer that says “This is sin. It is bad for you. It will not make you feel good. It will not make you look good. It will not make other people like you.” I will not be tempted to blow off a diet by an offer of pickled pig knuckles, but you just might get me with a brownie topped with ice cream and chocolate syrup.

The attractiveness of this temptation of Adam and Eve was that it appealed to their egos. The serpent said “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The attraction was in the invitation to be God. We've said repeatedly over the past few months that self-centeredness is in some way at the root of all sin, and here it is in full flower.

We are suckers for the same temptation. We are tempted by the world to think of God's standards as old-fashioned, not really designed for our modern world. We prefer to think of ourselves as advanced, intelligent people, capable of making our own decisions without reference to God's standards. That is self-centeredness at its extreme – substituting ourselves for God.

That is the same self-centeredness that tells us that it is ok for us to bend the rules or make up our own rules. We are champion rationalizers when we put our minds to it – nobody is going to get hurt; everybody else is doing it; we are just fudging it a little bit. We know better than whoever made that rule anyway, and it should not apply to us – at least not this time. Adam or Eve could have said any of those things and sounded just like us. They were fully aware of God's standards, but they chose to make their own rules, to decide for themselves which of God's standards really applied to them. Both the fruit and the power to set the standards looked attractive to them. Adam and Eve's response to this temptation revealed the rebelliousness and self-centeredness of human nature – the same rebelliousness and self-centeredness that is revealed in us every time we reject God's standards.

The third fundamental of temptation relates to the first – we are happy with the authority and freedom to choose, but we do not want to be held accountable for our choices. When God confronted Adam and Eve with their choices, their response sounded very 21<sup>st</sup> century: “It was not my fault.” Adam pointed at Eve and Eve pointed at the snake, but neither acknowledged their responsibility. If this happened today, they would be calling 1-800-SUE-THEM and getting themselves on TV as more victims of the evil serpent. Everybody is a victim – of their environment, of their up-bringing, of their lack of something – and it is all somebody else's fault. We love our freedom, but hate responsibility.

The last fundamental of temptation is that God's grace brings forgiveness and reconciliation to our sin. The primary consequence of sin was – and still is – alienation from God, a distance that we create by separating ourselves from God. When we separate ourselves from God's standards by our sin and disobedience, we create barriers to experiencing God's love and mercy and grace. God continues to pursue us in spite of our disobedience, and wants nothing more than He wants us to return to Him. He wanted that badly enough to die on a cross for it. The forgiveness and reconciliation of God is made real in us when we accept God's offer of grace, when we admit our state as sinners, and turn in faith to God. That returns us to the first fundamental of temptation that we discussed – the power that we have to choose. We choose to succumb to temptation or not, to follow God's standards or not, to accept God's grace or not – and we are accountable for those choices.

God's offer is always there for us to choose, no matter what other choices we might have already made, no matter what distance we think there is between ourselves and God. The reach of God's grace is always greater than any separation we think we have made – grace greater than our sin.

The story of Adam and Eve does not end with sin, and our story need not end there either. We humans all share in their weakness and their rebelliousness and their self-centeredness – and we also share in the reconciliation brought about through God's grace. Our freedom to choose and our accountability for our choices have not changed. The choices are continuous – choices we make every minute of every day that determine who we are. God calls you to listen – to hear His voice encouraging us not to stray from the path, and to choose Him: His ways, His grace, His salvation, His life.

Amen