

Failures and Faithfulness: Adam and Eve

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church

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Genesis 3:1-21

This morning we start a new sermon series called Failures and Faithfulness. In this series we will look at important Bible characters, people whom God chooses and loves, but who nevertheless fail in their walk with God. They drop the ball. They succumb to temptation. They wander from the path. We will study their failure so that we can learn from it. In every case, the sin that trips up these Biblical characters, are the same sins that trip us up, so we will learn from their mistakes, but more importantly we will see how God's faithfulness persists through their failure. Again and again, in this sermon series, we will see that where we fail, God is faithful. And that faithfulness will lead us again and again to the cross, which is where we want to be in Lent. Today we will reflect on the first and perhaps most famous of all Biblical failures, the fall of Adam and Eve.

Years ago, the radio program *This American Life* did a show around the theme of superheroes. One of the show's segments involved the producers asking people, 'If you had to choose between superpowers, which would you rather have? Would you rather be able to fly? or would you want to be able to become invisible whenever you wanted?' It seems like a kind of a fluffy question, but as the producers of the show explored the answers people gave it became revelatory.

At first, most people chose the power to fly because that would be so cool, right!? That would be fun! To be able to soar above the city and see the world spread out below you. That would be amazing. So most people started out by choosing flight, but as they talked about their choice and as they reflected more on what you could do when you were invisible, people started to change their choice. The more they thought about it, the more they found themselves leaning away from flight and towards invisibility. Why? Because invisibility gave them power and control. Flight may be fun, but when you can make yourself invisible you have power. Power to go wherever you want. Power to learn people's secrets and take their things. Power to go where you want to go and do what you want to do without anyone knowing. Power to manipulate and control. And so people started to move away from the joy of flight and towards the power of invisibility. The segment ended up revealing some of the darker leanings of the human heart.

Some of these dark leanings show up in the heart of Adam and Eve. Eve and Adam didn't choose invisibility, they chose to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. *What motivated them? What led them to make that choice?* To understand their motivation, we have to understand that God always intended Adam and Eve to grow and develop as people. They weren't going to spend eternity wandering wide-eyed through the garden, admiring its beauty, they were supposed to grow in wisdom and knowledge. They were supposed to fill the earth. That's the assignment of Genesis 1:28. God tells Adam and Eve to fill the earth and subdue it. That means, build things. Make homes. Make towns and cities. Discover the properties of creation and use those properties to weave fabrics and make music and build buildings and cook delicious food and plant gardens. When

the Bible portrays the perfect and Holy dwelling place of humans, in the beginning it pictures a garden, but what does it picture at the end? A city! The new Jerusalem with streets and walls and gardens. So we humans were always meant to build something. We were meant to develop.

And that development was always meant to take place within a network of loving relationships. The most important was their relationship with God. Adam and Eve would grow in a loving relationship with God. He would lead them and teach them about themselves and about the wonderful world they lived in. They would also be in loving relationship with each other—companions who help each other and share the joy of discovery and creativity. Finally, they would be in loving relationship with the world around them, caring for it as God had told them to do and discovering its properties and wonders.

Think of it this way: in the garden Adam and Eve are part of a kind of loving apprenticeship. God is the master craftsman and they are his apprentices. God walks with them and teaches his craft. That's how it goes in an apprenticeship. The apprentice electrician spends years learning his craft, learning his tools, learning his materials under the loving instruction of the master electrician. When he starts out, everything is done under the master's watchful eye. The apprentice can't just reach out and take a tool and tackle a job on his own. But one day, after he puts in a lot of time, he will finish his apprenticeship and the master will say, "Congratulations, you are ready to go out on your own. You have the wisdom and the knowledge." In the same way, there are some Biblical scholars who suggest that over time, as they grew within their loving apprenticeship, God would have allowed Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. "Congratulations, you have learned your craft. You are ready."

Which leads us to the heart of the temptation: The serpent suggests to Eve that she can just skip the apprenticeship. She doesn't have to spend all those years listening to God, having God teach her day after day, having to go through the discipline of learning and waiting. She and Adam can have instant power! "Eat the fruit and you can have the power and the knowledge now. You won't have to depend on God, waiting for him to tell you what to do, you won't have to rely on him! You will have the power! You will have the control! You will become like God, like the master, knowing the difference between good and evil. And you can have it all right now! You don't have to deal with the hassle of discipline and learning!"

It's a strong temptation. You can see the allure right? God's way is slow, it involves relationship, it involves dependence, and it involves love. There is power in it. God's way puts us in charge of creation, but the power is earned slowly and it's always attached to obedience and relationships and love. The serpent's way is quick and it promises power without dependence, without relationship and ultimately without love. Adam and Eve cannot resist the temptation of this instant power, so they take the fruit. They choose the way of independence and instant power. They reject God's way of love and relationship and obedience.

The choice offered to Adam and Eve is a choice that is offered to us all the time in all areas of life. Especially in a technological age, we are constantly offered instant power apart from love and relationships. And just like Adam and Eve, we regularly take the fruit. In his most recent book, theologian Andy Crouch calls this

the temptation of Mammon. “You cannot serve God and Mammon,” says Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Often that word ‘Mammon’ gets translated as money, but the word in the original manuscript is Mammon which is not just a word, it’s a name. The name of a god, a demonic power who has set himself against the living God. And, says Crouch, Mammon has an agenda. Mammon wants you to trade your relationships for things, to exchange love and connection and for power. to exchange interpersonal connection and mutual dependence for independence and efficiency.

Crouch gives examples of this exchange. He talks about how when he was younger and poorer when he and his wife had to move, they couldn’t afford movers, so they did what I have done and many of you did when you were younger and poorer: they called some friends. Together with their friends, they spent a long sweaty day loading their stuff into a truck and then unloading the stuff at the new place. It was hard work, but it was a day of rich relationship and mutual dependence and love. Later when Crouch moved again, his wife’s employer paid for the move. They just walked out of the house and a week later all their stuff magically appeared in their new home. They never even saw the movers let alone learned their names. It was totally impersonal. Is hiring a mover a sin? Of course not. But an exchange has been made. Using the technology of money, you’ve exchanged something personal for power and efficiency. Make that exchange often enough and something starts to happen to the fabric of your life.

Here’s a question: How many of you know the name of your UPS driver or your Amazon driver? I’m guessing none of you. It didn’t used to be that way, right? I did Harv Westveld’s funeral a few months ago. Harv was a Fed Ex driver and his kids told me stories of the relationships he had with all the people on his route. He loved them and they loved him. They used to exchange gifts and stories. They all knew his name and they knew his story. But now that’s all changed. Even though we have more deliveries than ever, we don’t know the names of the delivery people. Why not? Because there is this unquestioned assumption, an unquestioned value, that says that we should do all this as quickly and cheaply as possible. And the cheapest and quickest way to do deliveries is to have a computer give the rider a new route every day, one chosen for efficiency.

What happened there? We made an exchange. We want our stuff quickly and we want it cheaply—we want free delivery. And in exchange we’ve given up personal relationship. We had this choice between more relationship or more stuff and more efficiency. And we chose stuff, because that’s obviously the root of our society’s problem, right? We don’t have enough stuff. We have plenty of relationship, but not enough stuff. Is that our problem? Of course it isn’t!! Relationship is what we need! Love is what we need and everyone knows it, and yet when given the choice, we keep choosing stuff and efficiency over relationship. We make the same choice as Adam and Eve, and Mammon is very pleased.

The choice is perhaps most clearly revealed in the realm of our sexuality, which is supposed to be a deeply personal and relational realm. As God designed it, sex can’t be instant, or gratuitous. It is a gift enjoyed by two people who go slowly working on their relationship, cultivating their love, apprenticing themselves to one other before the face of God, sacrificing for each other and caring for each other. And as their relationship grows, so does their sexual expression, until before the

face of God they make covenantal promises at which point the gift of sexual pleasure is fully enjoyed. They get to eat the fruit. The enjoyment is all about a relationship built over time with mutual sensitivity and mutual sacrifice. But every day we are offered the power and pleasure of sex without all the complications and work of time and relationship. Pornography is an instant, virtual sex. It promises you the gratification of your desire in whatever flavor you like without any relationship attachment at all. Power and pleasure without relationship. It's pure mammon and many, many people have taken a bite of that apple.

Adam and Eve fall. We fall. But despite our failure, God is faithful. God seeks out Adam and Eve in the garden, and while he punishes them-gives them over to the natural consequences of their sin-God also holds on to them. He casts them out of the garden, but he makes them clothes to cover them. Adam and Eve created their shame and need, but God covers it. Which is pretty much what God has been doing ever since. We sin, we make the mess, and God covers it, God pays the price.

Then in verse 15 we hear about the seed of the woman, this seed who will crush the serpent's head. Jesus is that seed. He will come to this earth and his coming won't be efficient, but boy will it be personal. His coming will be powerful, but not in that quick fix kind of way that the serpent offered, it will be the slow power of sacrificial love. Jesus will walk a long road with 12 clunky, misunderstanding disciples. He will look in the faces of thousands of hurting people. And then he will suffer a slow death on a cross. Calling in an army of angels would have been a quick fix, but this is the way of relationship. This is the way of the heart. This his Father's way of love.

Early in his ministry, the devil will come to Jesus and try to push him off this slow personal path. He will make the same offer to Jesus as he made to Adam all those years ago. He will offer Jesus instant power. "Jesus," he says, "you don't have to deal with those tedious disciples! You don't have to endure the mess of the cross to gain your authority! I will give you power over all the kingdoms of the world, right now. It's super-efficient! All you have to do is bow down and worship me." But where Adam failed, Jesus is faithful. He refuses the way of Satan, the way of Mammon. He chooses the way of his Father which is slow, but full of community, full of relationship and full of love.

And so today again he invites you to his table, for his meal. Here at this table Jesus holds out to you his fruit. But this food is not like the fruit that the serpent offered. This is not fast food. This is the slow food of relationship, the slow food of discipleship, the slow food of love. This fruit is the fruit of the forgiveness that can cover over all your failures. So come to the table, take this fruit, take eat remember and believe, and join with Jesus in his long slow work of love.

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