

It was the most horrible day of their young lives. Adam and Eve had lived in perfect union with one another. They had walked with God in the garden that He had made and placed them in. And they had thrown it all away. The seductive suggestions of the serpent had persuaded Eve that God wasn't telling them everything; moreover, that she and Adam could be gods themselves. “If you eat the fruit,” the serpent had said, “you will not surely die, instead, a whole new world will open up to you.” It was a lie from hell itself. And, it worked. Eve believed it. Adam joined her in non-faith and unholy action, and their world came crashing down.

Their easiness with one another now seemed shameful somehow, so they clothed themselves with fig leaves. Worse than that, when they heard God's footsteps in the garden in the cool of the day, rather than running to his side, they ran and hid in the shadows. God's gentle questions drew them out to confront their terrible new reality. Imagine what Adam and Eve must have thought as God cursed the serpent. The cold shot of adrenaline coursing through their veins. Stomachs churning with a newfound sensation: fear. And then, God reveals the consequences of their disobedience as well. Pain in childbearing. Struggles in their relationship. Work becomes a toil and trouble. And, ultimately, death is unleashed. “...to dust you shall return.”

I can't imagine living through that can you? Well, wait a second. Actually, I can imagine saying or doing something that ruins everything. I can imagine having something beautiful and good and crumpling it up and throwing it away. And I suspect that if you look back through your own memories you don't have to imagine a scenario like that, because you lived it. If you dwell on it, you can still feel the regret and the pain. All because we wanted what we wanted and made ourselves the God of our lives (lower-case G, of course), and it led to a horrible outcome.

Back to Adam and Eve. We're not quite done with their worst day ever. The final consequence announced in Genesis chapter 3 was expulsion from God's garden. The place where their relationship with God had started and had been nurtured was now closed to them, guarded by a sword-wielding angel. Everything is ruptured. Nothing is as it was. One wonders how Adam and Eve even got along with each other from this day forward. Sin has that kind of corrosive effect on everything. They now have no access to the place of their greatest happiness. No access to the tree of life. It was the most horrible day of their young lives.

However, God himself embedded hope in Adam and Eve's worst day. I would point you to three things. First of all, Adam and Eve would have rather obviously noticed that they had not returned to dust immediately. Although life was shattered by their choices, they were still alive to live it. So there was that. There was hope in just not being dead yet.

But also, God had said something when he was cursing the serpent. Something about enmity, warfare, strife, between the serpent and the woman and between their offspring. He had said something about a person who would bruise the serpent's head and the serpent would strike that person's heel. What was that about? Who would that person be? The destruction of the

serpent would be great—but when exactly would that happen? It was something to look forward to—which is the essence of hope—but it did not sound like this could happen immediately.

That's what makes the third thing so powerful. After the temptation; after the decision to disobey; after the shame; after the hiding; after the questions, the promise, and the consequences; God served Adam and Eve. He provided for them. In the flow of the text it's easy to miss, but in verse 21 it says, "and the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." He knew that fig leaf garments were not going to cut it. They needed something more durable. So he clothed them with animal skins. Why is that so powerful?

Well, unless God had some spare animal skins just lying around, they would have to come from somewhere, or rather, something. And if you've seen things like furs, animal pelts, or bearskin rugs, you have a sense of how this process would have worked. Adam and Eve had sinned and experienced shame for the first time, but they had not turned to dust immediately and that was a mercy from God. God clothed them, and in order for God to clothe them, something had to die. The text does not state this explicitly, but if we hold open the possibility that God had Adam and Eve watch as the skins were prepared, can you imagine the impact that would have had on both of them? It would have been a living (or perhaps I should say dying) object lesson about the wages of sin. Disobedience leads to death.

But there's something else happening there too. Do you see it? God uses the shedding of blood to cover human shame. No, Adam and Eve would not have to die that very day, but some other being would have to die so that they could go on living. I submit to you that this isn't just a plot point, but a crucial detail in the story. Because God is justice, he must enforce the consequences of sin. And because God is mercy, he provides away to life for his fallen children. That embedded pattern of hope gets very real here as the animal skins are placed on their bodies, and Adam and Eve wear the sign of God's patient forbearance.

Even as Adam and Eve were escorted from the garden, wearing their replacement garments, the promise of that one singular person, the serpent crusher, would not have been far from their hopes and dreams. And, of course, fast forwarding through thousands of years of history, you know who this takes us to. Jesus would be the One to crush the serpent's head, but that serpent would strike with lethal venom at the cross of Christ. The jaws of defeat led to victory, however, at the resurrection of our Lord. Jesus' victory transforms his cross from a depressing sign of death to the new tree of life, as stated so beautifully in the hymn by Stephen Starke: "Now from that tree of Jesus' shame/flows life eternal in his name/for all who Trust and will believe/salvation's living fruit receive/and of this fruit so pure and sweet/the Lord invites the world to eat/to find within this cross of wood/the tree of life with every good."

Adam and Eve lived...and they experienced much heartbreak and pain...but they had hope in the one who was coming. God had promised. They lived a long time, but did not see His day. You are in a different position. The Promised Serpent Crusher has come. His heel done the stomping. You have access to the tree of life. This means that if you've come here today with horrible guilt; a regret that haunts you; if you said or did something you can't believe you're capable of and you have trouble forgiving yourself; just stop and listen. You are forgiven in

Jesus' Name. There is no price left to pay. Jesus paid it. There is no rupture in your relationship with God. Jesus endured the breaking of relationship on the cross. Before your heavenly Father, you are "cleansed and redeemed, no debt to pay." There is nothing to do except come and see Jesus making his cross a tree a life, and in faith, say, "I know you did that for me."

And as refreshing as that is, there's still more for you, because God is still in the business of clothing people. To give you even more confidence that He really has forgiven your sins, He clothes you, not with animal skins, but with a priceless garment. According to the apostle Paul, "As many of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (or, "clothed yourselves with Christ")(Gal. 3: 27). If you are a baptized believer, do you realize, you are wearing Jesus? I want you to visualize this: Everything that Jesus ever did and said—His perfect life, His innocent, sacrificial death, His victorious resurrection—woven into a robe or a scarf or a shirt, it doesn't really matter, the point is, Jesus puts the record of His entire life and accomplishment into that garment and then you get to wear it. Now, it all counts for you. It's like you did those things. That's how God sees you. Baptized believer, you are wearing the righteous life record of Jesus. He's given it to you. He has clothed you. Wear it with great thankfulness, because it means your every sin is completely forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.