12/1/24 – Advent 1 – The Fall – Genesis 3

Well, good morning. This week we are launching into the season of Advent. This is the four Sunday's leading up to Christmas. So, we will be setting aside our series in Matthew for a few weeks, through Christmas, then a couple weeks after as well. We will pick Matthew back up in the early weeks of the New Year.

So, the general thrust of Advent is meant to prepare our hearts for the celebration of the Lord's incarnation, marked especially by his birth. So, over the course of the next four weeks we will be looking at passages and concepts that help us to grasp the significance and majesty of this special birth. In the coming weeks we're going to look at the promise of Christ's birth, the pronouncement of his birth, and the plan for his life and work. But, to set the stage for all of that, today, we are going to look the problem – the problem that the incarnation of the Son of God solves for us.

One of the central aesthetic marks of Christmas is the image of light shining in the dark. Think of Christmas lights, or candle-lit services. When you think of Christmas, one of the main pictorial representations of Christmas and Christmastime is the picture of light shining in the darkness. A warmly lit country home, hosting family for a Christmas feast while outside the cold snowy wind whips the dark countryside. When we think about Christmas, when we think about Advent, we're thinking about the light, breaking into the dark. So, to get started, today, we need to talk about the dark.

We saw the problem already in our last song there, Joy to the World. Most of the song is about that joy, about the king who has come, about the savior who reigns, and about his rule of truth and grace, but the third verse is particularly relevant to our topic today.

The third verse went like this: “No more let sins and sorrows grow, \\ nor thorns infest the ground; \\ He comes to make his blessings flow \\ Far as the curse is found.”

So, in this verse Isaac Watts is answering the ‘why.’ Why is Christmas a big deal? What is the problem that the birth of Jesus solves? There’s sins and sorrows – something wrong with us. There’s thorns infesting the ground – something wrong with creation. And all this is the result not of random unfortunate chance, not because God didn’t make the world good in the first place, but because of “the curse.”

So, that is our topic today, the curse, or, the fall, or, the term we will use the most, original sin. We’re going to look at the curse today to get our bearings in the night for the rest of the advent season while we anticipate the light.

So, the first thing we need to do today is get something of our theological bearings. So, what I want to do right out of the gate is get some clarity on what God teaches us about original sin – what it is, and what it means. So, we’ll start with a brief definition, before explaining and applying it a bit. The point is to give you a certain pair of lenses, to take with you into our passage this morning.

One quick note, before we get into the thick of it. One term you are going to need to have at least a functional definition of on the front end is ‘covenant.’ We just can’t really talk about original sin, or the fall, without the concept of covenant in view. So, a covenant, in kind of its irreducible minimum definition, is a legally defined wholistic relationship. It’s kind of like a contract, that legally defines a relationship, but it goes beyond that. It’s kind of like a close relationship, like your best friend, except it’s legally defined. The best modern example is

marriage – it's not just a transactional relationship, but it is legally defined. Citizenship is another decent example. Ok, that's kind of a quick definition of 'covenant.'

That being said, here's my definition of original sin. It's a bit lengthy, so if you're a note taker, I'd encourage you to listen the first time I read it, then just pull out the key nuggets the second time I read it. If you want to try write it all down, just remember I warned you.

Ok, here it is, original sin means: "Being covenantally, and naturally descendants of Adam – the first man – we inherit both guilt and corruption from him, such that from birth we are (A) condemned and alienated from God, and under his curse, and (B) bent dispositionally away from God and godliness and towards sin and self."

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Or, more simply, it is inherited guilt and corruption, that means we are alienated from God, and bent away from him by default.

One thing I want to stress over and over, as often as I can, is this two-dimensional nature of the Biblical story. There is something legal going on – something covenantal – and also something *natural*, something having to do with our very nature. So again, Adam is our covenant head, so his fall leads to guilt for all his offspring. And he is the prototype of the human race, so the his fall leads to corruption for us all.

Ok, let's build up a little bit of a wide spectrum biblical portrait of this. First, look at Romans 5, go ahead and flip there if you can. The Bible spells out original sin by connecting the

work and effects of Jesus with the work and effects of Adam. In Adam, one man's guilt and corruption gets passed on to many. In Jesus, one man's righteousness and holiness gets passed on to many. It's not exactly the same thing, it's not a perfect parallel but it's the best parallel that you're going to find. Paul spells this out here in Romans 5. Hopefully you're there, I want you to see something.

Notice verse 12, "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." So, again, Adam wasn't just the first one to sin, in fact, he wasn't even that, Eve ate the fruit first, but through Adam, sin entered the human race in a foundational way. His one sin made sin and death a normal part of the human experience.

Next, I want you to see verses 18 and 19, and how they play off each other. He isn't just repeating himself here.

18 – "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."

Here, he's talking about an act and a status. One trespass (an act)… leads to condemnation (a status). One act of righteousness (an act)… leads to justification and life (a status).

19 – "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

Here, he's talking about a state and a state, or a nature and a nature. Adam's disobedience (a state)… leads to us being sinners (a state). Christ's obedience (a state)… leads to many being made righteous (ongoing process of moving from one state to another).

So, in Adam, all were condemned by covenant and made sinners by nature.

But, in Christ, those who believe are justified by covenant, and in a process of being made righteous by nature.

So hopefully you're starting to notice the two key points, the two key poles of original sin – both guilt and corruption – a legal, covenantal problem, and a natural, *what we are* level problem.

Ok, now notice a couple other verses that speak about our status and nature after the fall.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Romans 3:9-12 "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks [*that's everyone, Jews and Gentiles*], are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'"

So, the Biblical portrait of man is not a blank slate, not a neutral party when it comes to God. We are all born alienated from God, and opposed to him in our own hearts – bent away from him. This is the great problem of the human experience.

I want to read a couple quotes for you from some older theologians to show you something of how this idea has been chewed on down through history.

This first one is from Athanasius, an Egyptian theologian from the 4th century. "Human beings, turning away from things eternal and by the counsel of the devil turning us towards things of corruption, were themselves the cause of corruption in death… human beings died and corruption thenceforth prevailed against them… For, even in their transgressions human beings had not stopped short of any defined limits, but gradually pressing forward they had passed

beyond all measure: from the beginning they were inventors of evil and called death and corruption down upon themselves."[1]

The second is from Petrus von Mastrict, a Dutch theologian from the 17th century, "The substance of [original] sin includes two things, first the guilt which we have from Adam… then that stain and corruption itself that inheres in us. The first is customarily called imputed original sin, the latter inherent original sin."[2] Imputed being – what is counted to us, and inherent being what is true of what we are.

So, when we are thinking about original sin, we're thinking about imputed covenantal guilt, and inherited corruption that we get from Adam.

Ok, so why am I going so deep into the weeds on this one?

The main reason is this: original sin is the most demonstrably observable of all Christian doctrines, yet, it is the doctrine that your heart will work the hardest to explain away. This is the doctrine that is the most disagreeable to unmortified human pride. So, I need you to see, this is Biblical, and this is basic Christian orthodoxy down through the ages.

On top of our own hearts, when it comes to areas of disagreement between secularism and Christianity, there are few disagreements that strike a chord more deeply than this issue.

So, what original sin teaches us is that the majority of our problems in life, and especially our greatest problem – sin and death – come from within. And the majority of the solutions we need, and especially our greatest solution – Christ and grace – come from outside ourselves.

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[1] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, *Popular Patristics Series*, no. 44b (Yonkers, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 54.

[2] Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 451.

For the secularist, the problems are external, and the solutions are internal. For the secularist, sin and misery come from external factors, bad circumstances, economic hardship, other people's failures – usually your parents – and the solution comes from within, being true to yourself, finding yourself, expressing your true self.

But for the Christian, (well, for the human) the source of our own misery is not external to the human heart. Sin comes from within, and we need external resources to point us in good directions. As children, we need firm and disciplined parents to help us learn discipline, character, and competence. We need good laws and good cultural norms to help us learn self-denial and virtue. And above all, we need the grace of God to break into history, and into our own hearts, to redeem us from the inside out.

So, we need to be familiar with the doctrine of original sin, because our world and our own pride would love nothing more than for you to be ignorant of it.

And this is also why I want to be careful to lean on the traditional term, original sin. Since at least the 5th century, this has been the term that the church has used. And, whenever we start to see old ideas getting repackaged with a new term, we should be a bit cautious. What do I mean?

This is just my observation, so I could be off base on this, but it seems to me like 'original sin' has fallen out of use in the last couple decades, and terms like "fallenness," or "brokenness" or something similar are being used as substitutes.

And I don't think that those are totally inappropriate terms. I think a lot of that substitution comes from a simple lack of familiarity with the traditional term. And I think that some of it comes from a fine desire to be a bit more palatable to modern sensibilities, to be a bit

less offensive. And that's not always a bad thing. It's certainly not always a good thing. But it's not always a bad thing to try to use language that's aimed to avoid antagonizing your audience.

It seems to me that a part of the reason that "fallenness" or "brokenness" is a bit less offensive to modern sensibilities is that it tends to be more compatible with an externalized concept of the human problem, that sees us mostly as victims, not sinners. Where 'original sin' is pretty plainly a term for an internalized human problem.

So again, if you use the term "fallenness" that's fine, there is a real sense that we are victims of the brokenness of the world, and you could very well mean the exact same thing that the church has always meant by original sin, but just be aware that there is some reason that that term feels a bit safer in our modern context. Sometimes it's the right term, but sometimes it's not.

Ok, so we've seen the doctrine, but what does it mean for us? How does knowing this help us? Let me give you three high level applications for this doctrine of original sin, to kind of prime you, before we jump into our text for the morning.

First, Original sin helps us understand who we are.

Humanity is the most fascinating creature on the planet. On the one hand we exhibit near supernatural competence and control over nature, and supreme acts of virtue, honor, self-sacrifice, and nobility. But on the other, nothing comes close to us in our capacity for creative, ingenious evil. The first three chapters of the Bible help us to understand just why we see such incredible extremes in ourselves and our fellow men.

Alongside the doctrine of original sin, the first two chapters of Genesis teach the doctrine of the *imago dei*, or the image of God. God made us uniquely in his image. So our incredible capacity for good and for mastery comes from this. But then this same mastery can be equally

potent, post-fall, in expressions of our original sin. So these are the two great facts that color all the pages of every history book, and these two doctrines, the *imago dei* and original sin, explain why your own heart and mind are so often divided against themselves.

Ok, so it helps us understand who we are, but second, the doctrine of original sin helps us understand the real fight that we are in.

You have been called to a life of godliness, and satisfaction in God. Even for those who have been redeemed in Christ, the lingering effects of the fall remain with us until glory. So, the doctrine of original sin is like a bucket of cold water splashed in your face to wake you up to see the real fight that you find yourself in.

You are fighting uphill, you are outnumbered, and the enemy has ten points on the board before the opening kick-off. So, you have three options. You can whine about it, you can quit, or you can fight.

You can complain that it just isn't fair, and just watch sin kick you around on the field, devouring all that you love. Or you can just throw in the towel. Or, you can fight.

What original sin teaches us about the fight for God and godliness is two things: first, you cannot win without the grace and power of God, and second, you will not win without a great deal of focus, discipline, and grit.

We could see this all over the place, especially in Paul, but I want to quote for you just one place, 2 Timothy 2:1-6.

In verse 1, the Apostle Paul says, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Ok, there we see our need for the grace and power of God.

Skipping to verse 3 and 4, he says, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” There’s focus.

Then verse 5, “An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” There’s discipline.

Then, 6, “It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.” There’s grit.

Soldier, athlete, farmer – these are disciplined, gritty, tough callings that you are called to. In large part, these are called for because of the inward battle, the inward contest with sin, that comes from original sin. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, God will give you everything you need to win this fight, but you must fight.

Ok, so original sin helps us understand who we are, the fight we are in, and last, it helps us understand the kind of salvation we need.

We’ll cover this in more detail in the weeks to come, so I’ll just be brief here. Our problem is covenantal guilt, and natural corruption. So, we need more than just a good teacher to teach us. We need more than just a display of God’s love. And we even need more than just a rescue from the dominion of Satan. We need all that, and Jesus accomplishes all that, but we need something more, something deeper.

We need a covenant redeemer, to fulfill the law on our behalf, and to bear the penalty of the covenant in our place.

And we need a recreation – we need someone to bring the image of Adam to an end in death, and to resurrect us to new-creation, re-creation in the image of God in Christ.

We need the perfect life, the atoning death, and recreating resurrection of Christ to save us.

Ok, with that in mind, we should be ready to jump into our text this morning. What we're going to do is walk briskly through Genesis 3 to see the event known as the Fall – this is where original sin originated – this is where it comes from. We are going to see what happens to Adam and Eve, and what becomes true of us because of their sin.

Adam and Eve were created in perfect enjoyment of all the world's goods, and perfect fellowship with God. And, as a part of God's covenant relation with the couple he gave them a restriction. In Genesis 2:17 Adam is told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and told that if they do, they will die.

Then, at the start of Genesis 3, the serpent comes and tempts them, he entices them to eat from the tree. He says that if they eat of it they will become like God, knowing good and evil. It isn't obvious exactly what that means, but God affirms this, in verse 22 he says that "the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil." We'll come back to that idea of 'knowing good and evil' in a bit, but just hold on to that for now. In Satan's mouth it is a tempting offer, in God's judgement it is a dreadful calamity.

So, they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the one tree that was off limits. The one thing in all the world that God didn't give to them, they took. God literally gave them the entire planet to take dominion of and cultivate, so on all of planet earth there was one tree that they didn't rightfully own. And that was unacceptable to them.

Notice, they were tempted, and they were deceived, but not about the wrongness of their action. They were deceived about what would happen if they ate the fruit, but they knew full well that they weren't supposed to. They both freely chose to sin and disobey God, knowing it was sin and disobedience.

So, breaking the covenant, they received the penalty of the covenant – spiritual death – they were immediately cut off from God's spiritual presence, and quickly kicked out of the place of God's special presence. And they were put on a collision course with physical death. And they were put under God's curse: Instead of creation gladly working with them and for them – both the world around them and their own bodies – they (and we) were condemned to live in a world fundamentally opposed to us – to force us to scratch a living off it, and to propagate through pain.

So, through disobedience and sin, Adam and Eve inherited covenant guilt and curse, and we have been living in that curse, that guilt, ever since.

So, one thing that will be helpful to dig into here is the nature of the tree. What is the significance of this prohibited tree? Why is it off-limits? And what does it actually do to them?

There are basically three broad-strokes approaches to understanding this tree that you could take. The tree could be arbitrary, the restriction could be temporary, or it could be a special tree that had a unique ability to change human nature for the worse.

It could be arbitrary, in that it was just an apple tree, or a pear tree or something. And God just put a special fence around one and gave them an arbitrary rule to not eat it. Then, when they ate it, they gain the knowledge of good and evil, simply in that they now knew firsthand what evil is. That's possible, but I don't think that's the best way to read the text.

It seems like, for one, eating the fruit really did something to them. It really caused a profound change in our nature. And second, somehow, they became 'like God' in a certain, very limited sense. But firsthand experience of sin just isn't in any way 'like God.' In precisely that category they became less like God. So, the arbitrary tree view doesn't seem like a fit.

The second view, the temporary restriction view, seems a bit better, but it still doesn't seem a great fit to the text. This view would say that the knowledge of good and evil is something that God would have given to the human race eventually, but Adam and Eve just weren't ready for it yet. Like, they needed to stay under God's tutelage for a bit longer, and they just set off on their own moral trajectory too soon.

This is an interesting view, but it just doesn't seem to fit the text. However we understand this tree, we need to reckon with three key facts. First, it's called the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' So, whatever we say about it has to fit into that concept somehow. Second, it made us 'like God' in some sense. And third, being 'like God' in this sense is a bad thing, not just premature, but bad.

So that leaves us with the third option – that the tree was a unique and supernatural tree that changed human nature for the worse.

Again, there are a few variations on this view that should be considered, really all centering on the question, what is this knowledge of good and evil? First, is it just simple awareness of what is good and what is evil? The ability to tell the difference between the two? This should be rejected, just simply because it begs the question about the meaningfulness of the restriction itself. Obviously Adam and Eve had enough moral knowledge to know that obedience was good and disobedience was bad. So, "the knowledge of good and evil" is something more than just the ability to tell the difference between the two.

Another view, that's really interesting, suggests that this knowledge is not moral good and evil, but practical knowledge of the useful and unuseful. So, this knowledge is really talking about the kind of practical wisdom that leads to industry and civilization. This view sees the story of the fall as the story of humankind passing from innocent rural agrarian simplicity to urban industrial and political complexity. This move sees the great tragedy of this chapter as man kind's move from humble inhabitants of the land to lordly masters of the land.

This idea is interesting, but again, just foreign to the text. The major problem with this view is that taking dominion over the earth, and subduing it is exactly what God told humanity to do when he first created us (Gen 1:28). So, industry and civilization can be ugly and brutal and sinful, but it's not inherently contrary to God's will for us, it is God's will for us. The call is to do it righteously, in a way that cultivates the earth, not in a way that destroys it.

It seems like the best way to understand the 'knowledge of good and evil' is as a sort of knowledge of autonomy and independence. Meaning, knowledge as asserting the right to *determine* good and evil. Not just, "I *know*, this is good and that is evil," but "I *decide* that this is good and that is evil."

Herman Bavinck (a 20th century Dutch theologian) says it this way, "By violating the command of God and eating of the tree, they would make themselves like God in the sense that they would position themselves outside and above the law and, like God, determine and judge for themselves what good and evil was. The knowledge of good and evil is not the knowledge of the useful and the harmful, of the world and how to control it, but the right and capacity to distinguish good and evil on one's own."[3]

[3] Herman Bavinck and, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), p. 33.

Ok, so, I don't think I can prove that this is the right way to read what's going on, but it seems to be the best fit with both the story itself, what's actually happening, and the rest of the Bible.

For instance, in Hebrew (which this chapter was originally written in), the concept of knowledge is a bit broader and more nuanced than it is in English. Psalm 1:6 says, "the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." Here God's knowledge of the way of the righteous is contrasted with God's judgement on the wicked. This knowledge is more than just awareness or recognition, but a certain providential governance. "God knows the way of the righteous" is meant to give us comfort. To remind us that God is watching over us – and not just watching, but governing.

We could think of this in English idiom like the idea of "overseeing" something. An overseer doesn't just watch, he doesn't just see, but he directs, and governs. So, 'to know,' in Hebrew is similar, it isn't always just to be aware of, but sometimes to control, and govern. So, it seems likely that something similar is going on here.

Second, it fits with the general picture of godliness that the Bible calls us to - we are supposed to turn from our own autonomy, and submit ourselves to God's rule and reign. The problem isn't moral wisdom, but autonomous conceit that exalts one's own wisdom above God.

Proverbs 3:7 "Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil." The whole book of Proverbs is about the value of godly wisdom – we are supposed to be wise, we are supposed to be aware of the difference of good and evil, but we are supposed to ultimately submit that wisdom to God's revealed will. We are not meant to live autonomous lives apart from God's rule and word.

So, what does that mean for the fall and for original sin? What happened to Adam when he ate that fruit? Where before, Adam could choose more or less easily between obeying God, and obeying his own law, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil changed his nature and ours to make us implicitly assured in our own powers to determine right from wrong, and implicitly skeptical of God's Word whenever it contradicts us. By default we trust our own moral feelings, and by default we doubt God's revealed word.

So, we became like God in the sense that we came to operate as though we had no standard of goodness and righteousness above us. God just is the top, there is no law, no standard above him. He just is the goodness and righteousness that all goodness and righteousness points to. So, for us to cut ourselves off, and pull ourselves out from under him was a terrible thing. We became like God in being a law unto ourselves, beginning to define goodness by ourselves.

For us, now, the default is a self-assured autonomy. The difficulty is learning to humble ourselves before God and his Word. So, we see that in taking the fruit, Adam not only broke his covenant with God, and brought guilt to the whole human race, but sowed into us, his offspring, the seeds of our autonomous bent away from God.

This is why one of the key markers of a genuine conversion is a sudden love for God's Word. Before conversion, his Word was a foreign thing to us, a dry thing, a confusing and opaque thing. But, when the Spirit of God begins the great work of recreation in us, suddenly the Word becomes attractive, beautiful, and life-giving.

Next, I want to turn your attention to the theme of nakedness and covering in this chapter.

Notice verse 7, "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths."

And verses 9-10, “But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’”

So, what’s happening is not necessarily that they suddenly realized that they forgot their pants that day, but they suddenly realized how exposed they were, and how vulnerable they were – and for the first time, that was a terrifying feeling.

This is the opposite of the climactic statement at the end of chapter 2: “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” They were exposed, totally vulnerable, and totally safe – they had nothing to hide.

Now, they are exposed, and suddenly they feel the dread need to hide themselves.

All they had ever known is perfect harmony, perfect orientation towards God, and perfect openness to God. They were perfectly and simply in sync with God and his will, so they had nothing to fear from him, no inclination to hide anything from God, and because of that, they had nothing to hide from one another. All they knew was peace with God, and trust in one another.

But all of a sudden, their new bent towards autonomy bent them inwards, and built into them, and to us, a constant impulse to hide ourselves, to conceal ourselves within our own little walls. Autonomy and isolation go hand in hand.

Instead of being bent upwards towards God, and in that, opened outwards towards others, we are bent inwards towards self, and closed towards others.

How do we see this in our day? How do we tend to hide ourselves?

For some, it’s the work of denying that God even exists. We all live each day as though life were meaningful and purposeful, as though good is really good, and evil is really evil, as

though humans really have a non-mechanistic free-will, that your choices really are choices, not just neurons firing in the brain.

And yet, some try to convince themselves that the world is just mater and energy, while still living as though those things are somehow true and meaningful. This double-mindedness is a way of hiding from God.

For others, it's hiding behind good works. We look at some list of good things that we are doing, and we imagine it gets God off our backs.

For others, it's simple busyness – we get so busy in work, or school, or friends, or family, or your side-hustle, or whatever, that we push God out of the margins. As though we were too busy to deal with our creator.

Or for some, we hide from God behind our good reputation. We have a good name before other people, so we try to imagine that God sees us the same way that other people see us. But he sees our heart.

And saddest of all is the ways that we can use religion to hide from God. We can hide from God in religious busyness, or behind a good reputation at the church.

So, after guilt, comes corruption – and the center-point of corruption is our in-bent tendency to hide ourselves from God. This results in alienation from God.

So, this isn't the good news. This isn't the gospel. But it's important that we understand this, that we have a clear and firm grasp on the idea of original sin, and what it looks like in our own hearts, and our own lives.

Ever since our first parents, we have reenacted this same fall over and over and over again in our own lives.

In our corrupt state, we feel this pull constantly. Even if you're in Christ, you still have this lingering, residual, old self. Apart from constant vigilance and practice, we don't stay put, and we don't drift towards God and godliness. We drift, if we're just floating, we drift towards autonomy, and towards hiding.

And God sees you in that, and yeah, it's sin, but he sees you with eyes of mercy.

So, stop hiding from God. First, he already sees you, he already sees your sin – there's no point in hiding. But second, he's the only place you can go to actually find a solution to your sin.

If you cover your sin, it festers and grows.

If he covers your sin, it's healed – purged in the fires of his forgiveness, mended in the righteousness of his mercy.

Your sin needs a covering, but not the silly fig leaves of frenetic busyness, inane self-esteem, and petty good works.

No, you need something more.

So, we've seen guilt, corruption, and now, in 20-24, we see alienation, separation from God, exile.

Notice first, God's judgment in verse 24. He cast out our first parents, and set a guard. He isn't half-hearted or uncertain about this judgement. This is real, just, exile.

But that being said, notice the mercy of God in the midst of judgement. Notice verse 21. As God is exiling us from his presence, he takes care, and in tender mercy, gives us clothing to protect us. He doesn't just shove us out the door and slam it behind us. He shows us the door, we really are getting kicked out, we can't stay, but before we go, he packs us a lunch and gives us some money for gas. Even in judgement, we see mercy.

We had made little fig-leaf garments. We thought we needed superficial protection, but God knows better. The world he made was good, safe, and abundant, but the world we made is deadly. We need more than little fig leaves to protect us out here in the wild.

I want you to see something here in these hide garments. If we didn't know the rest of the story we would totally miss this. But I want you to see it.

In our corruption, we suddenly realize our need for a covering. We're vulnerable, and we need some kind of covering to be safe. First, God doesn't deny that. In a post-fall world, there's no going back to the simplicity of Edenic nakedness.

But also, remember the two dimensions of protection we need. Adam and Eve didn't just hide from their fellow creatures, they hid from God. We need protection from the world, but also, we need protection from God – and not because there's anything wrong with him, but because now we are corrupt, guilty sinners, and God's justice is a consuming fire, a righteous and holy justice.

So, he gives us animal skins to protect us from the savageness of the world – he sheds the blood of one of his own creatures to protect us.

But also, much later, he gives us the covering we need to protect us from divine justice. He sheds the blood of his own divine Son to shelter us from his own just wrath.

He clothes us in animals to protect us from animals. He clothes us in the righteousness of the Son of God to protect us from the righteousness of the wrath of God.

This is why we celebrate Christmas.

In the birth of Christ, we celebrate the beginning of our great redemption. In Christ, God plunged the flaming sword of his justice into his own heart – to open again the way to Eden – the way to life, to peace, to God himself.

We celebrate Christmas because we mourn the Fall. We celebrate Christmas because we recognize the sting and shadow of original sin in our own heart. We celebrate the light because we feel the darkness – crouching ever present at the edges of our consciousness.

Christmas is the first flicker of the light of the long-promised solution to the problem of Genesis 3.

In Christ, by faith, we are given back all that we forfeit in Adam.

In Christ, by faith, our guilt is swallowed up in his righteousness. He fulfills the righteous requirement of the Law – there is nothing more for you to do. He pays the dreadful and righteous penalty of the Law – there is nothing further for you to pay.

In Christ, by faith, our corruption is undone. We are a new creation. He gives us a new heart, he draws us out of ourselves. He draws us up to God, and out to one another.

In Christ, by faith, the way is opened to return to God. Our alienation is undone by his incarnation. He came to us, to make a way for us to come to him.

If you are in Christ – if you have repented and believed – the light shining in the dark is yours – no longer do you belong to the dark – you are invited in to that feast in the snow-whipped country home.

But if you are not in Christ, then you are still in Adam, and only the dark night of condemnation and death remains. Fig-leaf moralism will not do. You need the blood-bought righteousness of Christ.

So, stop standing out in the cold, and looking in through the window on this warm fire-lit Christmas feast that is Christ, and come in. Take off your snow-soaked coat of condemnation, and warm yourself by the fire of his mercies. Come into this feast of grace that he has prepared for you.

There is a spot for you at the table, but the only door in is the door of repentance and faith. All you need to do is knock, and it would swing open to you before your fist even hit the wood. So, come in.