

Uncovered and Unashamed

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[0 : 0 0] Vicki is going to come and read for us from Genesis chapter 3, verses 1 to 15. So Genesis 3, verses 1 to 15. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God actually say to you, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate. 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 they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 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. He said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? And the man said, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate. Then the Lord God said to the woman, what is this that you have done? And the woman said, the serpent deceived me and I ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, because you have done this, curse to you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field. On your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

This is the word of the Lord. All right, well, we read from the Garden of Eden story from Genesis chapter 3, and we looked at it last week and we saw that the world, the problems that we face in this world, that we can say that most of those problems come from us, human beings. We broke the world from the very beginning of human history. And so the human heart is the source of most of the problems that exist in our world. And we see right here at the beginning that we became self-centered people from almost the moment that God made us. And so this shows up in the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis, Genesis, the word Genesis just means beginnings, foundations. And the foundations really are just this, that God made every single one of us and we are his creatures. And we, in the beginning of human history, tried to invert the pyramid of creation. God, the creator, made us all creatures.

[3 : 08] But Adam and Eve, when they took and they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they tried, they attempted to flip the pyramid upside down where God was treated like a creature at the bottom. And we became gods. We became as if we were the creators of the world. We could define who we are. We could define our reality. And it all began in verse 1, we looked at this last week, with an attitude. So Satan tempted, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve and said, did God really say? And so the world broke because of attitude, a snark, a snark against God, mocking God and saying, that is ridiculous, God. Did God really try to tell us what to do?

Did God really attempt to say that to us? And so in that act, the snark, the attitude against God that exists in the bottom of all of our hearts, we inverted. We were made to be the image of God, we in that moment. And it's true of all of our hearts, we want to be gods. And that's what broke the world. And so Nietzsche, the 19th century philosopher, he was an atheist, but he had a real moment, I think, of expressing the truth in his heart. He says this through one of his characters, to reveal my heart to you, my friends, if there is a God, then I wouldn't be. Therefore, there is no God. It's not an argument, it's an attitude. It's a snark at the bottom of our hearts against God.

And I wonder if you could come, as we come back to Genesis 3 today, can you say, are you willing to say today that my greatest problem this very day is at the bottom of my heart? I don't trust God, I don't believe God loves me. I don't want to be created. I don't want to be a creature. I want to be the creator. I want to be the maker. That is the deep problem in the human soul, at the heart, at the bottom of every one of our hearts. And oftentimes we've called this story the fall story, so the fall from what humanity should have been. But another way to say it, maybe even better, is to call it the trespass story, the story of us trying to overreach our limits, to not be dependent creatures, but independent creatures. And in Milton's Paradise Lost, he writes about this scene, and the way he talks about it is when Eve eats from the fruit of the tree, she bows before the fruit. And C.S. Lewis commenting on that moment in Milton, he says, at the very beginning of human history, humanity first worshipped a vegetable. And, you know, he's being slightly cheeky about that, but it's true that ever since then we bow before creatures. We take all these little things in this world, things that are creaturely, that God made, and we treat them as our gods, our saviors.

Seeking self-salvation, we could take anything, sex, money, power, whatever it may be, a career, and we turn it into the vegetable that we worship, bow before the tree that we really worship. And so let's broaden this story today and ask the question, because of this inversion, because of this self-centeredness at the bottom of our souls from the very beginning of human history, what do we now face? And so for three weeks, the next three weeks of looking at Genesis 3, we're going to look at consequences, what this has cost us in the world. And so I just want to give you two of those today, and the two consequences that we face today are we are up against a war, and we have the problem of shame. And then ask, what do we need in the midst of those things? So first, this war that we now face.

All right, verse one, we've got an internal problem, self-centeredness, wanting to be God rather than be the image of God that we were made to be. But we also know from the experience of our lives and from this passage, we've got a lot of external problems as well. And the very first external problem that we see here is the problem of the serpent, verse one, the serpent who comes and he is crafty and subtle and deceptive. And this is the greatest of all external problems that we face is the serpent. This is the moment where we learn from the Bible that there is a personal, conscious, evil tempter that exists and seeks to destroy our lives. And the Bible calls this serpent Satan, and nine other names the Bible uses for Satan. And Satan here, this is, Satan here, Satan is a spirit in the Bible. And so Satan is using a physical being, a serpent, to speak and to work. And here he is crafty, he's a beast. He's, the word, the Hebrew word that's used for the serpent here is a word that can be translated to dragon, dragon-like, serpentine. And you might come to this as a modern person and say, as soon as I open the Bible, I encounter a talking animal. And I struggle with that as a modern person. But look, in verse one, that is exactly the point. See, because in verse one, when the serpent speaks, it's meant to say, reader, beware. Adam and Eve were supposed to be as shocked as you are as a modern person, because Adam and Eve had been given dominion over all the animals.

[8 : 30] And even to name them, and as soon as that story ends in Genesis 2, you flip the page, Genesis 3, 1, and there is an animal speaking, taking dominion over Adam and Eve. And they should have thought the same thing you think, modern person. What in the world? A talking animal? It shouldn't be. And they should have run and rejected this. So this was Satan working through the midst of a creature.

And it was an inversion of the order that God had made, Adam and Eve dominion over the beast of the field. And so in the rest of the Bible, we learn in Revelation chapter 12, we learn verse 9 that this is the great dragon who was, John the apostle says, thrown down, the ancient serpent called the devil, called Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. And in Jesus, in Luke chapter 10, verse 18 says, that he, he says, I saw Satan, the dragon, fall from heaven like lightning. So Jesus says, the Son of God says, I saw the great deceiver who was a holy angel made by God good, a spirit, fall from heaven.

Because of his pride, because of the same very issue that Adam and Eve face, his self-centeredness, his trespass that he didn't want to be a creature, he wanted to, he wanted to be God. And so he fell like lightning from heaven in the very beginning. And so C.S. Lewis writes a book about, about Satan and demons and their devices. And in the beginning of this book, he paints a picture, a spectrum for you.

And I think, I wonder, can you find yourself on the spectrum today, on this spectrum? Here's what Lewis says. He says, there are two equal and opposite errors into which our race, human race, can fall when it comes to the devils, Satan. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. So he says, on the one hand, you can disbelieve. You can say, I'm a materialist. I don't believe in this. On the other hand, you can have an unhealthy obsession with the spiritual realm and with the devils, the serpent himself, with Satan. And that's exactly what we see in our city. Here's another way to put it. Maybe you've encountered this before. If you do a little bit of a search of history of the ancient Near Eastern world where this story takes place during the time of the people of Israel. Many, many other religions, many, many other people groups had stories about a paradise lost, a serpent that came and deceived people. Many other traditions, many other religions had a story about a great worldwide flood that looks a lot like Genesis 6 to 9. Many did. And it's the same spectrum. So you can come to that as a materialist and say, look, everybody was just sharing the same mythologies. Or I think a better way, a true way, is to come and realize the reason that all these different religions in the ancient

Near East told this story, but in a different way, is because they were sharing in half truths a collective idea of a real history by which the world was broken through a serpent, through a deceiver, a paradise lost. And they had twisted and distorted that truth and written different mythologies around it. But they all have the basic idea, the same story, a half truth. And so let me just, before we move on, let me just say, I want to give you, in just a sentence each, three reasons why you should believe, I think, you should be compelled to believe in Satan and a personal, conscious, evil tempter that is at work to deceive the world. And here they are. Number one, if you are convinced at all by theism that God exists, that there is a God, then it is no stretch, not a stretch in the slightest to believe in a supernatural realm. So if you believe that in God, that God is a spirit, it is not, it's not stretched to then go and say, and there are other spirits as well. There are other supernatural beings as well. That's not a stretch. That makes sense. That follows from the first, first idea that God exists. The second reason is that most people, and I think we're safe to say 99, and I think we're probably safe to say 99.9% of all human beings in all of world history have believed in evil spirits. And even in a city like ours in Edinburgh, where we think everybody's modern, everybody just says, well, I don't believe in that because I believe in science, which is a silly thing to trade off on. Most people actually in Edinburgh, I think, still believe in the realm of the spiritual. And many, many people, thousands of people, in fact, in Edinburgh dabble in the spiritual realm. And the question is, are you dabbling in good things or evil things? And here we learn that these spirits, quite often, they're evil. That this is very well. But here's the third and final, and I think maybe the most important. For me, this is the one that helps me the most.

[13 : 22] It is a great relief intellectually, not to the heart, but intellectually, to believe in a personal, conscious, evil tempter called Satan that is at work in the world. Why? Because when you look out at the horrors of this world, and you are able to say, there really is a tempter, there really is utter evil, there really is a great deceiver, then it provides real intellectual relief of explaining why the world is so broken. When you look out and you see that many, many cultures, many, many religions have sacrificed humans at the heart of their religious practices. You can look at that and say, that is satanic. I have the power to look at that and say, that is great evil. You can look out and say, many, many cultures throughout world history have looked at ethnic people groups that are not them, and said, the most important thing, our mission in life, is to wipe out an entire ethnicity because they are the problem. And you can look at that and say, that is satanic. There is a great evil, a great tempter at work in the world doing very evil things. It's not a stretch at all. It's an intellectual relief to be able to say that there is an evil tempter, liar, deceiver. Now, in Genesis 3, verse 14, God curses Satan and says, on your belly you shall crawl, like below the other beast of the field. Is this the moment where snakes lose their legs? No. No, not at all. He's not talking about snakes in general. God is talking here to the serpent, Satan. And he's using language, normal, phenomenal, earthly language, to say something that we all recognize. And that's, if you go and say to somebody what is said here, you will lick the dust. If you will eat the dust. That is a curse. That is an insult if you say that to somebody, right? What is he saying? He's saying, you, Satan, will lick the dust. Meaning, you have lost all glory.

You have no glory. You were made glorious, but you have lost all glory. And you are now to be lower than the low. And what we learn here in the very next sentence is God says, I will now put enmity between you and the offspring of Eve, humanity. And we'll come back next week to look at Genesis 3 15 closely.

But today, I just want to say that, are you aware, do you know, do you believe that there is a war? One of the great consequences of our sin in the fall of Satan is that there is a war going on, a spiritual war, a real war. There is enmity. And enmity is not just, you know, a little bit of temptation here and there. It is saying, Satan hates you, hates us, hates humanity, and wants to do everything you can to deceive and corrupt and break this world and get every single one of us to stay exactly where we are. Passive. To never get serious about Christian faith. To say, that's silly. I couldn't believe in a talking service. See, but that is exactly what he wants. His greatest hope is that you never believe in him. That's his deception. That's his great deception. I've got to move on.

But C.S. Lewis, at the end of his book, he talks about the experience of writing a book about Satan and the demons. And he says that, though it was easy to twist my mind into the diabolical attitude, it was not fun. Or not for long, at least. The world in which I had to project myself was all dust and grit and thirst and itch. And every trace of beauty, freshness, and cheer had to be excluded.

Now, what is Lewis saying? He's saying, did you catch it? He's saying, when I tried to write a book where I put Satan's devices into my mind to try to rewrite them in a way that people would understand, he's saying, it was not hard for me to get my heart into the diabolical attitude of the serpent.

[17 : 24] And he's saying, but when I got there, I realized it was nothing but dust. It was a wasteland. What is he saying? He's saying, it was not difficult for me to think with a diabolical snark against God.

He's saying, it was natural to me. He's saying, at the bottom of my heart, I realized that it was not hard for me to be tempted to think like Satan thinks. And I wonder if you've ever found yourself feeling like your heart, your soul is in a bit of a wasteland. Grit, itch, thirst. That's what he says.

They felt like a wasteland. But that's where you are. You know, you're so overcome all the time by sadness and anxiety, by fear. You say, you know, it kind of feels like my heart is in a wasteland. And let me say to you, Christianity explains why. The best explanatory power you can latch on to is that Christianity tells the story that God made the world and it was good. And Satan and us alongside him broke it. And now we have a snark in the bottom of our souls. And sometimes our hearts feel like we're living in a wasteland. That's the great problem we face. Now, second problem we face is that one of greatest, Satan's greatest tools is his use of shame. And so in verse 7 here, the first consequence we see of the fall is that Adam and Eve, it says their eyes were open and they realized they were naked. And in chapter 2, verse 25, it says, before that they were naked and unashamed. And so it's implied here that as soon as they take and eat, they are now naked and ashamed. Shame. The idea here is not mere physical nakedness. That's not exactly what it's talking about, though that is there. But it's talking about something more. It's saying as soon as they realize their physical nakedness, they realize spiritual nakedness. And spiritual nakedness, this reality they experience when their eyes are open and boldened, is this experience of exposure, of saying that if I were to be known all the way to the bottom of whom I am, I would be naked. I would be exposed. I would deserve judgment.

And so we're told here that they experience in the very beginning shame for the first time. So shame, what is shame? Shame is the flip side of the coin of guilt. So guilt, judicial guilt, guilt is that we are not righteous. We are not the people God made us to be. But the flip side of that coin is shame. And that's the emotion of the experience of guilt. That where you awaken in your inner soul, your heart, your emotions, and says, I am not, I feel guilty. I am not who God made me to be. I have committed sins. And you feel that. And shame can be good in the world of sin. It can protect us sometimes. But shame can also become a condition, a bitter morsel that you continue to eat that won't go away. And so here in verse 7, one of the first things that happens is they have to cover, they cover themselves with fig leaves. They know immediately, I need covering. I'm not who I'm supposed to be. This is an act of atonement, a sacrifice. Quickly, I've got to break a branch off a tree and cover myself. As soon as sin enters the world, there's this feeling that we need sacrifice.

We need atonement. We need covering. Or we'll never be clean. I know, I don't know if you've ever had this dream. Some people have heard this dream. It's fairly common. Something like it. A dream where you are invited to a black tie party. I've used this illustration before here. A black tie party, very posh event, you know, something, a great ball, a great gala. And you show up in your dream, you're wearing your swimsuit. And, you know, if you've dreamt like that, or maybe you've done it, I hope not, but maybe you've done it. You want to run straight to the bathroom, straight to the toilet, and you want to cry, you know. And you want to cover yourself. Now, you're clothed, but you're just not clothed enough. But what do you feel like? You feel like you're naked, exposed.

[21 : 18] Let me bring this a little more close to reality. Maybe if you work with somebody a long time, like a boss, you come to the quarterly meeting, and your boss starts to go on and on about the profits of the past quarter. But you're the one who prepared it all in the accounts, in the PowerPoint, you know. And you know the truth, that everything the boss is saying is basically a 200% extension of the reality of how much money was actually made. But, you know, the boss's boss is there, and the boss's boss's boss is there, and your boss needs to look good. But in that moment, he looks over at you, and he sees you, and he knows that you know. And you just exchanged what the French existentialist philosophers called the gaze. The gaze. And you say, you're exposed.

What's happening in that moment? You're naked. The pride that stands underneath that experience, you know that somebody else in this room knows me, and knows that I'm faking this. I'm faking it until I make it. This is the same thing that goes on with what we call preacher numbers, you know.

Preacher numbers, what are they? They are when somebody asked the preacher, how many people came to the event last week? How many people were there on Sunday? And you say, two to three hundred. And, you know, your staff worker that knows you well says, there's a big difference in two and three hundred. That's a 50% increase. Which, you know, and it was actually 175. Everybody knows that.

But what's the gaze has taken place. Somebody has seen you and known you, that the preacher is struggling with pride, right? And that's to be naked. It's a spiritual condition. It's exposure.

And Karl Marx was right when he said alienation is the great problem of the human experience. Excuse me, but not in the way he said it. He said our alienation, the big problem we face as people, he said, is between the human worker and his capital, his labor. Alienation is right. We have an alienation from this very moment because of our nakedness, because of our spiritual exposure, that we feel guilt and shame. We are not who we're being. So we hide. We cover. We'll see even more next week how much we hide from God. But first, we hide from ourselves. We refuse to know the truth about ourselves. One of the hardest things that can happen in our lives is when you find out that a collective group of people who do indeed love you finally come and say to you in a moment of truth, hey, we all know that you're struggling with this, and you're not even aware of it. You're not aware that they know, but you won't even admit it to yourself, that everybody around you can see the vice that you struggle with most. And you know what? You think, well, I can see the vice that my spouse, my friend, my neighbor struggles with, but that's you too. That's all of us. And when that moment where somebody comes and says, you say, I'm unwilling to know myself. I've been covering with fig leaves the truth about my heart. Or we struggle with alienation from other people, from the people who love us most in our lives. In verse 12, God comes to Adam, and he says, what happened? Where are you? And Adam, the first thing he does, he says, she did it. The woman you made. Do you feel one of the hardest things in this world is relationships between men and women? Alienation between the two genders?

[24 : 41] That we struggle with each other? It begins right here. The alienation began, right? And it goes through all of our relationships, all of our relationships throughout world history. And even if you're a Christian today, you can hide in alienation. You can cover with fig leaves from other Christians, from the church itself. You might have been in this church for a long, long time, but you've not really let anybody know you. And you know, you think, somebody says, how are you? And you say, you know, you haven't prayed in two years. You're deconstructing, as people say. But you just say, I'm fine. And you won't let anybody know the truth. We hide. We cover. We focus. Why? Because at the bottom of our hearts, we were made to be known by God and other people in total harmony in the Garden of Eden and utter shalom and peace. We want to be known. We want to be loved. And we're so afraid that if we are truly known, if the fig leaves come off and people really know what's going on on the inside, we will not be loved. Now, that's called the condition of shame. Shame can help protect us. But sometimes shame becomes a disease. Shame becomes a condition. And C.S. Lewis says,

I sometimes think that shame, the mere awkward, senseless shame, does as much towards preventing happiness in this world as any of our vices can do. Now, let's move on and close with this.

Satan's strategy. Satan's strategy. You've got to know it. What do you do? You've got to first know Satan's strategy. Satan does the same thing in world history that he does right here. First, he comes and he tempts you. And he says, this is not a big deal. Do what you want. Be your own God. Live for yourself. And then as soon as you commit the act, as soon as you bow before the vegetable, he comes immediately and accuses you and says, no one is ever going to love you if they know about that. You are unlovable. You are unforgivable. And boy, don't ever come to God for help because God hates you for what you've done. And in that moment, shame starts to become a bitter morsel. The fruit of the tree becomes the bitter morsel of shame that you swallow. And it gets deep down in your soul. And some of us, some of us here struggle with this. And you begin to believe no one will love me. Nobody can love me. If I was honest about who I am, my struggles, my sins, my past, what I'm walking through right now, nobody will love me. And eventually you can become to a place of such hopelessness where you think I am unlovable. What can you do? In Zechariah chapter 3, there is this moment where the high priest Joshua is standing in the temple and he experiences a vision of God. But there, as he stands before God's throne, Satan is next to him. And Satan is standing to him talking to God. And we learn in that story, Zechariah 3, 1-3, that Zechariah is the high priest, the only person who has access to the Holy of Holies, into God's holy temple. In that moment, the Hebrew says, he is clothed in filth. His robes are covered in filth. It's translated filth.

The Hebrew word is excrement. He's clothed in the most disgusting of filthy garments. And then Satan begins to accuse and say, this is your man. This is the priest, God. He's dirty. He's filthy. He's rotten.

He's not lovable. He is covered. In other words, he's experiencing that. The truth, the nakedness of his soul is now being worn on the outside in his clothing. Filthy. Dirty. And Satan says, does Satan ever say to you, what did you think would happen if you did that? You brought this on yourself. You can never be forgiven.

[28 : 41] And then right next to him, all of a sudden, in Zechariah 3, the angel of the Lord appears. And the angel of the Lord says, take off his filthy clothes. And the angel of the Lord says, he turns to Joshua and he says, see, I've taken away your sin and I will put fine garments upon you.

Now, who is that? The angel of the Lord? In the Old Testament, it's not an angel of the Lord. It is the angel of the Lord. And the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is the very Son of God.

It is the one who would become Jesus Christ. And when you come to the gospel story, you come to John chapter 19, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is hanging upon, just before he's hung upon the cross, we're told the soldiers, the Roman soldiers, ripped his clothes off of him and took his clothes. And fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 22, they gambled his clothes away. And in the style of Roman crucifixion, Jesus Christ was murdered at the cross naked, unclothed. And in that moment, you see, this wasn't just Jesus Christ taking on physical nakedness. This physical sign, this horror, this shame was a sign of the spiritual reality that Jesus Christ took your spiritual shame, your nakedness, the truth about he took the filthy garments of Joshua. He took the nakedness of our hearts, the truth, the exposure, the spiritual plight, the reality, the shame that we bear, that we've created. He took it on and he was murdered at the cross naked in our place. He bore your shame and became naked in that moment so that we could be clothed in glory, so that we could be cleansed in his righteousness. Isaiah 53 says, he bore your shame, Jesus Christ did. So let me apply this and

I'll finish. What you need today to fight the corruption from Genesis 3 of shame and Satan's devices is not just to believe in the abstract concept of God's, of Jesus' mercy to you.

You know, most of the time we, we, you might be a Christian, but it's just abstract. What you need today is really to taste the truth, the sweetness, you know, put away the bitter morsel of shame and really taste the sweet bread and wine that Jesus Christ really is merciful to you, really does want to forgive you and clothe you in better clothes than your shame. And let me ask you today, look, if, if God himself knows everything about you, and he does, and he knows the shame in the bottom of your heart, and he loved you to the point of becoming your nakedness and your shame at the cross, can you not look up today and say, I am known and loved to, to the very bottom? You can say with Paul in Romans 8, if God is for me, who can be against me? No matter how many times Satan comes and tells you, you cannot be loved, you're not lovable. You can say, if God is for me, who can be against me? Nobody, nobody can.

[32 : 00] And so Martin Luther, in one of his famous hymns at the Reformation, mighty fortress is our God, he said, the prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure.

One little word shall fell him. What is that one little word? Luther wrote, the one little word that shall fell the devil is liar. You are a liar. If God is for me, nothing can be against me.

We're going to sing before the throne of God above, and I want to ask you, can you sing this line today from your heart, from your soul? Though Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and I see Jesus there who came to put an end to all my sin. Let's sing it together.

Let's pray. Father, come now and give us a heart that would long to sing the words that you really have put away our filthy garments and our exposure, Lord. Thank you, Jesus, for taking on our nakedness and shame at the cross and clothing us with better clothing, the clothing of your glory.

And so I pray today that as we sing, somebody would experience that truth, that reality in their lives, and we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.