

“Eyes Wide Open,” Genesis 3:1-8 (Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost, October 8, 2017)

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, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> 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.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.<sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.<sup>8</sup> 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.

## PRAY

We are working our way through the book of Genesis on Sunday mornings and today we come to chapter three, the account of the fall of man from his original glory.

And of course one of the first questions we have when we read this passage is: what is the deal with the serpent? It’s clear from other parts of the Bible that the serpent is the devil, he is Satan, or the serpent was somehow inhabited by Satan. But who is he? Where did he come from?

The short and best answer is that while those are interesting questions, it would be nice to know the answers to those questions, Moses, the author of Genesis, was not concerned with them. We are never told the origin of the devil or why he came to the garden that day, and we do not know exactly why God allowed it to happen. We can make guesses that would fit in with the rest of Scripture, but that’s all they’d be.

Moses’ goal in writing Genesis is something different. He wants us to focus not on the origin of Satan but on the origin of sin.

Sin – sometimes that word can seem quaint, or even cute. We talk about sinful desserts, sinful pleasures, or how something is “uglier than sin,” but when we use the word “sin” that way we really minimize its importance and power. We start thinking sin is something that’s not always the best idea, something uptight people would frown at but we can wink at, something that would never go on the cover of *Southern Living* magazine, but not as something that’s all that serious. What Christians call “sin” is really what the people who are in the know call “fun.”

But it’s not. We read in our passage for today, a very famous passage from Scripture, of the account of mankind’s first sin. We will see four things about sin: first, the lie that is the foundation of all sin. Second, the temptation that leads to sin. Third, the devastation of sin. Fourth, how to overcome sin.

First, the lie that is the foundation of all sin. Let's re-read verses 1-3: "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, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden"?' <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> 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.'" <sup>4</sup> " Genesis 3:1-3.

When it comes to understanding how Satan works, you must know that he does it through lies. There Jesus says about him "there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44.

Satan, working through the serpent, wanted the man and the woman to sin, he wanted them to rebel against God, and he does it through lying to them about God. But he's very careful in how he lies to them. He does not tell them obvious lies. For example, he doesn't come up to the man and say: "This garden in Eden stinks. What a dump. You need to get away from this place. You need to get away from a God who would put you there."

The serpent doesn't take this tack – why? That lie is obviously not true. The garden was paradise. In fact, we get our English word "paradise" from the Hebrew word for "garden." It would have been foolish to try to convince the man and the woman to sin on those terms because they could see for themselves they lived in a beautiful place.

The serpent didn't come to the man and woman and lie and say, "God is not generous. He never lets you do anything. He is so cruel and hard and mean. You need to join me and rebel against him." That too would have been obviously untrue. I don't think we can say this too much: God gave the man and the woman only one rule – don't eat the fruit of this one tree. You can do anything else you want in the garden. There are no other prohibitions! I'm giving you a billion yes's and one single, solitary no. We see how generous God is through life in the garden.

It wouldn't have worked, so of course Satan didn't do any of that. Instead, he was crafty. When he speaks he asks a seemingly innocent, but in reality devious, question: "Did God actually say...?" What the serpent doing here? *He is sowing the seeds of doubt.*

What kind of doubt? <sup>4</sup> "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5.

The serpent says to the woman, "God does like you. He did create you, after all. He makes sure you're fed and you have what you need here in the garden. He lets you enjoy the scenery and run around with the animals and be in charge of them.

*"But he doesn't really love you.* You know, you're kind of like the family dog to God. You amuse him, you make him laugh, he gets a kick out of you, he feeds you, but he doesn't really love you.

“You know how I know God doesn’t love you? Because he won’t let you be like him. He won’t let you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God knows what good and evil is, and that’s one of the main things that makes him God and you just a human. But he won’t let you find out. He doesn’t want you to open your eyes. If he loved you, he’d open your eyes for you.

“I’ve got your best interests at heart. I want you to experience everything. So listen to me! Open your eyes, and then you will be like God.”

Friends, the lie that is the foundation of all sin is that *God doesn’t really love you, he’s not really going to provide for you, and you can’t trust him.* He doesn’t want what’s best for you. He’s withholding good things from you. He wants to keep you in your place and prevent you from being happy and free like him.

The only reason we ever sin is because we believe that lie. Think about it with me practically for a moment and how this works. First, let’s talk about a so-called small sin: lying to client or your boss about why you were late to a meeting. You tell the them you were late because of traffic, traffic was so bad on West Jackson. And, yes, traffic does get bad on West Jackson.

But the truth is something more like this: you were late because that morning you wanted to stay in bed another twenty minutes, and then when you did get out of bed you wanted to have one more cup of coffee, and you wanted to watch just a few more minutes of Sportscenter, so you didn’t get to your car until there was only five minutes to spare. And then when you did get on the road you were stuck behind everyone else who procrastinated that morning.

You lied. That’s a sin. Colossians 3:9 says, “Do not lie to one another . . .” Now, why did you lie? Because in that moment you were more afraid of what your boss thinks than what God thinks about you. In that moment, you didn’t trust God to tell the truth. You think it’s up to you to tell a little white lie so you can get by and keep your job. And you do that because deep down, you believe the fundamental, foundational lie: God doesn’t really love you and he’s not going to take care of you.

Let’s talk about a so-called bigger sin: adultery. We know the commandment: “Do not commit adultery.” Exodus 20:14. We know it’s wrong. So why does it ever happen?

Because when one person is unhappy in a marriage, when things aren’t going well with their spouse, they all too easily think: “This isn’t right. My spouse pays no attention to me. I deserve better than this. This person over here is interested in me, this person finds me attractive, this person cares about me. My spouse doesn’t. I don’t care if adultery is called a ‘sin.’ If God loved me, he’d make sure I was happy.”

But we only think like that when we don’t trust God, when we think his rules are made to keep us from happiness, because deep down, we believe the fundamental, foundational lie: God doesn’t really love you and he’s not going to take care of you.

If we really believed in God and in his perfect love for us, we would never sin. It would be completely logical to act in a way that conforms to God’s will – he loves us perfectly, he will

provide for us perfectly, so we should obey him perfectly – nothing else is logical. But we don't, and that gets us to the second point.

Second, the temptation that leads to sin. Since we all know believe the lie to some degree, we are all now exposed to temptation. If we didn't believe the lie, we'd be immune. But now that we do, we are susceptible to temptation. That's what happened to the woman.

If you look back at verse 3, the woman says, "We're not supposed to even touch the tree." Some commentators think the woman there is twisting the command of God. I think it's more likely that it shows how determined she is to obey the command of God. God says don't eat it, so I'm not even going to touch it.

The woman never even considered getting near the fruit of the tree until she started to believe the lie. But once she heard the serpent out, it was a different story. "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." Genesis 3:6. What happened? *The woman entered into temptation.*

It's not for no reason that one of the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer is "lead us not into temptation" because temptation, if you enter into it, will lead to sin. "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." James 1:14-15. It's a chain reaction – we believe the lie that God doesn't love us, we are led into temptations we did not consider before, and it ends with sin.

It's not a sin to be tempted, and when we are tempted we don't have to sin. Jesus was tempted, yet he did not sin. We can resist temptation. We have these Fighter Verses in the bulletin every week to help you memorize Scripture. They run on five year cycles. The first one I ever memorized ten years ago when I first started using them is the fighter verse for today: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." 1 Corinthians 10:13. That verse means that while we will all face temptation, we don't have to enter into it. We can resist it.

The woman's mistake was considering the temptation instead of resisting it. The serpent told her how wonderful the fruit of the tree was, and she should have said, "I don't care if this is the best fruit on the planet, I can't get near it! It is not for me! Get away from me, serpent!" Instead, she considered his arguments. She said, "Well, I know I'm not supposed to eat this fruit, but it does look so good. And I do want to be wise like God. And God wants me to be happy, so surely this will be ok." Instead of resisting, she considered.

In 1652 Thomas Brooks published what has become one of the all-time great manuals of the Christian faith: *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. I highly recommend it to you. In the first section of the book Brooks sets out twelve devices, or temptations, Satan commonly

uses to draw people into sin. I'll read some of them, and then give you an example of the self-talk that goes along with them so you can identify them in your own life.

By showing you the short-term sweetness of sin (the bait) and hiding the long-term misery and dangers (the hook). The self-talk is: "This will feel so good! Even if it's not a great idea, I deserve it."

By getting you to rationalize sin as virtue. "I'm not really greedy, just thrifty! I'm not an alcoholic, it just helps me relax! I'm not a mean person, but someone really needs to cut her down to size so I'm going to do it."

By getting you to minimize the evil of sin. "Who will it hurt? Or even know?"

By showing you the sins of others, while hiding from you their repentance and grief. "He did it, and he's ok!"

By stressing the mercy and forgiveness of God, and playing down his holiness; thinking you can have God and the sin. "God will understand; God wants me to be happy."

By getting you to over-confidently live where sin can happen. "I can control this; I can stop whenever I want to."

By showing you how the immoral prosper and seem to never be miserable, or by showing you the suffering of those who are godly. So you say, "What good is my self-control anyway?"

It is absolutely necessary you recognize how the enemy employs these temptations in your life, because if you don't you will experience ...

Third, the devastation of sin. "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths." Genesis 3:7.

We'll talk about these verses more next week, but for today I'll say this: *sin always leads to regret*. The man and the woman ate from the fruit of the tree and their eyes were opened, but their eyes weren't opened the way they thought they'd be. Their eyes were not opened to new experiences, to new vistas of glory and power, but instead they were opened only to their own shame. They had to cover themselves, they had to hide. You know immediately after they ate the fruit they regretted it.

Sin always leads to regret. One of the most powerful things I've ever read describing this kind of regret was in a column in *The New York Times* from 2010 titled, "A Roomful of Yearning and Regret." The author, a woman named Wendy Plump, cheated on her husband years before, in the early nineties. And she writes about how after that experience she found herself more than once trying to talk her friends out of doing the same thing.

She writes that when you are tempted to have an affair, "Start ... by picturing yourself in the therapist's office with your betrayed husband after you've been found out (and you will be found

out). You will hear yourself saying you cheated because your needs weren't being met. The spark was gone. You were bored in your marriage. Your lover understands you better. One or another version of this excuse will cross your lips like some dark, knee-jerk Hallmark-card sentiment.

"I'm not saying these feelings aren't legitimate, just that they don't legitimize what you're doing. If you believed they did, your stomach wouldn't drop on your way out the door to your lover's. You wouldn't feel the need to shower before climbing into the marital bed after a liaison. You wouldn't feel like a train had struck you in the back when your son asked why you forgot his lacrosse game the other day. When you miss a family function because of work, you get over it. When you miss a family function because you were in a hotel room with your lover, you feel breathless with misery.

"What you don't know, or perhaps what you don't allow yourself to think about, is that your life will become an unbearable mix of yearning and regret because of it. It will be difficult if not impossible to be in any one place with contentment.

"This is no way for an adult to live. When you're with your lover, you'll be working on your alibi and feeling loathsome. When you're with your spouse, you'll be dying to return to your love nest. When you are at home, everything in your life will look just a little bit out of register — the furniture, the food in your refrigerator, your children, your dog — because you've detached yourself from your normal point of reference, and it now belongs to a reality you've abandoned.

"Once the affair is out in the open, you will strive mightily to justify yourself. You will begin many sentences with the phrase, 'I never meant to —' But one look at the hollow-eyed, defeated form of your spouse will remind you that such a claim is beside the point. You can both get over this, yes. But the innocence will have gone out of your union and it will seem as if a bone has been broken and healed, but one that rain or cold weather can set to throbbing again.

"Sooner or later your illicit, once-beloved object of affection will become tawdry, wearying. You will come to long for simple, honest pleasures like making dinner with your sons or going out to the movies without having to look over your shoulder.

"In the end your marriage may not need to be trashed, though mine was ... By the time all was said and done, there was little left to save ... I look at my parents and at how much simpler their lives are at the ages of 75, mostly because they haven't marred the landscape with grand-scale deceit. They have this marriage of 50-some years behind them, and it is a monument to success. A few weeks or months of illicit passion could not hold a candle to it ...

"If you were 75, which would you rather have: years of steady if occasionally strained devotion, or something that looks a little bit like the Iraqi city of Fallujah, cratered with spent artillery?

"From where I stand now, it all just looks like a cheap hotel room, whether you're in that room to have an affair or to escape from the discovery of one. And despite the sex and the excitement,

or the drama and the fix of everyone's empathetic attention, there is no view from this room that is worth having."

"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." 2 Corinthians 7:10. That column is one of the best examples I know of an account of worldly grief producing death.

You say, "Well, of course something like an affair is devastating." Yes, but so are all other sins. You have an affair, and the consequences come all at once. It's immediately devastating. But even if you just tell little white lies about being late, there are no big immediate consequences but give it time – *sooner or later, no one will believe you about anything*. If you're the one who feels the need to cut people down to size with your "humorous" and sarcastic remarks, sooner or later no one will trust you enough to have a real relationship with you. They'll run from you. You'll be all alone. Sin always devastates, and that gets us to the last point.

How to overcome sin. We must overcome it – how can we? We need to do two things: *first, fill your minds with sin's ugliness*. Do you know why God told the man and the woman not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Not because God was jealous of them or wanted to keep them in their place. **It's because man was only made to know good, not evil.** We were made to know God, not sin. We can't handle sin. Any bit of sin in our lives is like poison working through our souls. And by eating the fruit, man and woman plunged themselves and everyone who came after them into rage, ruin, and decay.

*No matter how good the sin looks in the moment, in reality it's no good for you.* Sin takes good things in your life and gets you to think they are ultimate things and then drags you down from your rightful place as someone made in the image of God and makes you live more and more like an animal. For example, money in and of itself, is a good thing. You can do a lot of good with money, you can buy food and clothing with money, you can help others with their needs. But if you misuse money, if you build your life around making it and keeping it, if you get your self-worth from how much of it you have, it will turn you into a monster. It will cost you your health, because you overwork. It will cost you your family, because you're never around for them. You'll want to kill yourself if you lose your money. Sin drags you down.

That's why John Owen at one place wrote: "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." If you want to overcome sin, fill your mind with its ugliness.

*Second, if you want to overcome sin, fill your hearts with Jesus.* Do you remember how on the night he was betrayed, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray? The disciples are with him and he begs them, "Please stay awake with me – I am so sad and scared that I think I'm going to die." Remember that? Then we read this: "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'" Matthew 26:39.

What's this cup Jesus talking about? It's the cup of God's wrath. You see, we are to stay away from sin, we are to flee from it, we are to fill our minds with its ugliness, but instead we've done it. We're sinners, our sins are an offense against a holy, righteous God who is sovereign over the

universe, and because he is just he will punish all sins. We deserve God's wrath – but Jesus deserved God's love, because he never sinned. Yet out of love for us, Jesus Christ on the cross drank to the dregs the cup of God's wrath we deserve. The man and the woman failed the test in their garden, but Jesus passed the test in his.

And when you see how serious your sin is and when you see Jesus drinking the cup for you and the beauty of it fills your heart, **you will not want to sin.** One of my favorite characters from *The Chronicles of Narnia* is Puddleglum. In the book *The Silver Chair*, Puddleglum and the children and Prince Rillian are in a room with the wicked queen in her underground, evil kingdom, and she drops a powder into the fire in the fireplace. The powder fills the room with a sweet smell, which makes everyone drowsy and makes it hard for them to think. The powder casts a spell designed to keep them in her underground, prison world, and she's just about convinced them that there is no world above ground and that Aslan the lion doesn't exist. All their memories from above ground and of Aslan are just a dream.

But at the last moment, before they completely succumbed to the spell, Puddleglum steps on the fire with his big Marsh-wiggle foot and puts it out. Everyone starts coming out of the spell. Then he says to the queen, "Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things-trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it."

Puddleglum refused to let his mind dwell on anyone but Aslan, he'd rather put his foot in a fire than lose focus on Jesus (and if that's not a metaphor for resisting temptation I don't know what is).

Friends so many times sin will come to you and tell you lies about your sin, such as, "Everyone does it, it's not serious," or "You deserve this" or "No one will ever know." Or, it will come to you and say, "God doesn't care," or "God will understand," or "God, if he exists, can't really love you or be trusted." But if you fix your minds on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith, you can say to the sin that tempts you, "I'm on Jesus' side no matter what. I'm on Jesus side even if there isn't any Jesus to lead it (though there is). Look at what he did for me. If he didn't abandon me when he was tempted with avoiding the wrath of God, how could I abandon him now?"

The sins that tempt you, whatever they are, will eventually bring you down. They will eventually lead to regret and pain. They will take you where you don't want to go and cost you far more than you would ever want to pay. Therefore, do not give in to them. Fix your minds on Jesus. See the ugliness of sin and the loveliness of Christ, of how much he loves you. Enjoy the world God has put around you, but don't make yourself a slave to it through sin. Through Jesus Christ overcome sin, and find the joy that you can get only through obeying God the way you were designed to. AMEN