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FIRST BLOOD

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In 1982, Sylvester Stallone played a starring role in the movie *First Blood* (which, by the way, I've never seen, and I'm not making an endorsement of it). The idea of the title was that since the main character was attacked first, he had a right to defend himself. I didn't really realize this until after I'd picked the title for this sermon, after which I searched the Internet with those words. As it turns out though, the title is really very appropriate because it gives the contrast of fallen humanity's ideas and God's ideas. The natural man's idea is that if you hurt me, I've got a right to hurt you. God's idea is something else entirely.

The idea of first blood is a part of the many responses we find at the end of Genesis 3. We'll spend most of our time on that particular response, but there are others to consider as well.

Let's look at Genesis 3 again:

20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

Genesis 3:20 seems like a rather curious insertion at this point, doesn't it? God has just made all of his pronouncements resulting from the curse of sin, and the prices that humanity and God Himself will pay as a result of that sin. Here, at this point in the narrative, Adam gives his wife a name: Eve, the mother of all living.

What this actually shows is that Adam believed the word God had spoken to him and his wife. Adam believed that Eve would have children, and that those children would populate the earth. Adam knew God would keep His promise, and he knew at this very point in time that God was not going to destroy him and Eve. Though they would eventually die, they still had life, and they still had purpose in that life. Adam believed God, and Eve's very name is a reflection of his conviction. Adam's very first response to all that God has said is belief: He believed God was right to judge him and his wife; He believed in God's mercy in meting out justice to them; he believed God's promises to them; and he believed that God still had a purpose for them. All of these beliefs are conveyed in this one little verse.

Let's examine the next verse:

21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

This really is the heart of this message, because it's the heart of the gospel. We have in Genesis 3 a tale of two coverings: one made by man to cover himself, and one made by God to cover man. The best man could do on his own was to fashion "aprons" of fig leaves to cover his nakedness. Why did man even need a covering in the first place? He was ashamed to stand before a Holy God! Adam, by his own efforts, tried to make a covering for himself to cover the shame of his nakedness; but that covering, for all the effort he put into it, was simply not acceptable. The day would come when men would learn to weave fibers from plants into clothing, but that is not the point here. The point is that the man, working on his own, was unable to fashion a garment to cover his shame. God must act.

Here in verse 21, God does just that. He takes animals and sheds their blood to make covering for Adam and Eve--coverings which *are* acceptable. We are used to bloodshed and slaughter, but for Adam and Eve, the death of these animals must have come as a terrible shock. They watched as God singled out the innocent animals that would perish for them, as He killed the animals and prepared the skins to make a suitable covering for the shame of their nakedness. What wrong had the animals done? *Nothing!* The animals were innocent, and very likely known to Adam and Eve. The innocent suffered for the guilty.

That is God's picture for what He would do regarding His promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15. God promised to send a Savior who would be bruised. God apparently established at this time a sacrificial system for Adam and Eve, because we find in the next chapter that Cain and Abel knew what constituted an acceptable sacrifice. We'll talk more about that later, but for now it seems that God instituted a sacrificial system for mankind--a means of covering the shame of their nakedness and of covering their very sins with the shed blood of a perfect, innocent animal.

We find this sacrificial system in place all through the Old Testament, right up to the very time of Jesus Christ, of whom John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This was God's plan from the very beginning:

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God (I Peter 1:19-21).

Does it seem unfair to you that an innocent lamb should die for guilty men? Does it seem unfair to you that Jesus, the Lamb of God, should die in the place of the condemned? *It is.* It is extremely unfair. God did not give us what we deserve; instead, He poured out His full wrath upon Jesus Christ, His Beloved Son. Jesus willingly drank the cup of God's wrath for you and for me, down to the very last drop. Not one drop of that cup was left.

We have talked about four kinds of separation stemming from this original act of sin: separation of man from God, separation of man from himself, separation of man from other men, and separation of man from nature. There is one more separation; in fact, it is the ultimate separation: when Jesus fulfilled God's promise of Genesis 3:15, when He was bruised for our transgressions, He was for a space of time separated from the Father. We cannot with our finite minds truly grasp the meaning of this separation. God the Father and God the Son are One; and yet the sin of humanity poured out upon Jesus separated Him from His Father. In that short span of time, God felt the greatest pain the universe has ever known, or will ever know.

The main idea, though, is that God, through Jesus Christ, paid the full penalty for our sins. God created man as a significant being in history, and He proved the significance of man by allowing man to make the choice to rebel of his own free will, and by allowing man to make the choice to respond to Him in belief of his own free will. God made man to communicate and have fellowship with Him; and He sent His Son to die in our place to restore that broken fellowship. Man has significance.

This is God's meaning of "first blood": "My blood in place of the guilty. You have offended Me, and you are out of fellowship with Me, but I will pay the full price of restitution." God gives us what we do not deserve, and that gift is *mercy*. He can allow this mercy because He satisfied His own terrible *justice*. Man's idea of first blood is exactly the opposite: "Your blood belongs to me because you are guilty. You have offended me, and now you must pay. I will make sure that you pay."

We're not setting aside the need for justice; we are wired for it. What a terrible world this would be if there were no justice! It's just that where fallen man demands *retribution*, God offers *restitution*.

Now friends, what about these last verses?

22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

23 Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

These verses have been the source of much speculation, but we need not be confused. Remember, the Tree of Life in the Bible represents communion with God: we eat what He eats. The time will come when we will be able to eat of that tree again in heaven. For now, though, we have another meal that allows us to commune with God, and that is the Lord's Supper. I turn now to a rather lengthy but informative quote from Dr. W. P. Gadsby:

Now, use a little lateral thinking. What else in the Bible is real and material, yet at the same time symbolises the life which is in Christ and points us repeatedly to Him? Something in which Christians share, and which reminds them that Jesus' death brings us life? It is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Now, let us return to the Garden of Eden. I want to suggest that the Tree of Life was there to perform such a **sacramental** function. If Adam passed the test of obedience, it would be the means of God's imparting eternal life to him, not by magic, but by the working of his Spirit 'by, with and under' the fruit of the Tree.

But Adam sinned. He failed the test and lost his right to eat from the Tree. As one commentator puts it, 'that he might understand himself to be deprived of his former life, a solemn excommunication is added; not that the Lord would cut him off from all hope of salvation, but, by taking away what he had given, would cause man to seek new assistance elsewhere.'

Just as Christians who profane the Lord's Supper are subject to judgment, so Adam would have been further condemned if he had presumed to eat the fruit to which he was not now entitled. In doing so, he would have been trying to rob life from God, a grave blasphemy. The implication of Genesis 3:22 'And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever,"' is that he, and us with him, would have been plunged into a condition of absolute lostness. He would have lived eternally cut off from God without hope of escape from the terrible consequences of sin. This would have been God's just punishment for such a presumptuous sin, not merely a 'magical' effect of the Tree of Life.

Mercifully, God did not permit this to happen. Adam was cast out of the Garden of Eden. No

longer could he even contemplate eating from the Tree of Life. It was beyond his reach. Physical death now began to enter the human race. Adam began to die! The last Adam (Christ) later came to Earth to die so that through faith in Jesus, we may now inherit the eternal life Adam forfeited. Indeed, Jesus says to those who persevere in faith, 'To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the Paradise of God.'¹

As the hymn writer wrote so long ago, "Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."

¹ W.P. Gadsby, "The Tree of Life." *Creation Ex Nihilo* (June 1985), 7(4):24. Available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v7/i4/treeoflife.asp>.