

Sermon #234
Genesis 2, 3
February 18, 2018 **First Slide**

Tragedy in Paradise

(Start in the garden area putting planting soil in a pot, then begin speaking.)

Oh, good morning. I didn't see you come up behind me. Welcome to my garden. I'm so glad you have come. I hope you like gardens. I certainly do. Gardens are beautiful places to be where we often feel at peace and one with nature and God. And a garden reminds me that spring is just around the corner and soon we will be in our gardens once again.

I've been in many beautiful gardens, and I'm sure you have too. We have some wonderful gardens right here in Dayton, as I mentioned in the video. I love going to the Cox Arboretum. But I've also enjoyed many gardens around the world, such as the Japanese cherry tree gardens in Tokyo, Japan. They were quite unique. I'm also remembering the gardens that my father-in-law, the late Bob Wachtel planted. He had all kinds of vegetables, sweet corn, pop-corn, and many marigolds. He loved marigolds and planted them all around his house the trees and the barn out back. Whenever we went to his house in the small community of Millbrook, Ohio, I looked forward to seeing his marigolds. And maybe that's why I like marigolds today.

Today, I would like to take you to another garden, one that you've never seen or been to before. It's part of our historical past. Our first ancestors were placed in this garden for a purpose, and what happened there affected the whole human race. I'm speaking of the Garden of Eden, the beginning garden of creation.

And believe it or not, there are many garden references in scripture, some are literal places and others are metaphorical. During this season of Lent, a time of preparation for Easter, we will visit some of these gardens of scripture. In each garden, something crucial occurs and major decisions are often made. So, today, we visit the very first garden in scripture. What really happened here and why? I take you now to the Garden of Eden, also known as Paradise, to see it before a tragic moment occurs. First, let's look around and get a feel for this place:

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I. Life in the garden before the tragedy

We see greenery everywhere, natural, healthy shrubs and plants are all around us. Many streams water the fertile soil that produces much vegetation. Animals are everywhere – wild animals and later domestic. All species of birds fly over our heads. Likewise, all types of fish are in the waters around us, beautiful to behold. Four major rivers flow through this land and many precious elements are found here such as pure gold, sweet-smelling resins and gemstones. Many magnificent trees of various types

surround us. They are very attractive in sight and their fruit is all good and all for our consumption and pleasure.

Even more significant are two main trees planted in the middle of this garden. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That second tree is one we are to stay away from. God has specifically forbidden that we eat from that tree for on the day that we do so, we will certainly die. All the other trees we can eat from, but not that one. Why? Well, boundaries are established even in this beautiful garden. And the creator of the garden expects us to keep those boundaries. You see, he is the owner of the garden and we are not. We are just placed here to take care of the garden and to know the creator of the garden – to have a relationship with him. And we are not robots, we've been given a choice. We can decide to follow and obey him or not. I think that's why that tree is placed here. That means that we are held accountable for our actions. We must learn to worship the creator and obey him from day one.

But there is one thing wrong in this breath-taking environment. Everything is good except for one thing. We look around and see a solitary man. He is all alone, because there is no one else like him in all the garden. Next, we see the Lord God go into his creative mode again and perform a surgery on the man, taking a rib from his side and forming a woman, making someone like him and equal to him in all ways, and yet different as well. She would be his "suitable helper," a compliment to him in every way. Together they will form a lasting bond of marriage where the two become one flesh in an intimate, harmonious relationship for life. So, we see that the two of them together are created in the image of the creator of the garden.

Now the garden is complete. There is beauty, harmony, and relational-wellbeing between the man and the woman and between God and humans and animals. And a wedding has taken place. We know that because the author of the story has told us three times that she is his wife and twice that he is her husband. I could just imagine this gorgeous, stunning wedding in the garden. Who would have been the witnesses of this wedding? The animals, right? Maybe a rhino and a hippo are part of the wedding party. Okay, maybe they were more domestic animals. I can imagine that the best man is a faithful, loving, golden retriever. He sits so proudly by Adam's side with a big smile on his face. And the maid of honor is a fury, calico cat who is all curled up by Eve's side and purrs through the whole ceremony. But afterwards she just goes her marry way, like all cats do, right? And the official, the pastor in charge, is none other than the Lord God himself. He brings all marriages together in the perfect bond of one flesh.

Everything now is complete. All is beautiful, and all is in harmony. All people and all created beings, the whole land and water are all good. So, what happened? We continue our visit of this attractive garden by reviewing the moment of the tragedy.

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II. Life in the garden during the tragedy

Adam and Eve are both naked and feel no shame. Yes, that shows the intimacy and the harmony between them, but also foreshadows what is to come, because the

word used for naked is very similar to the word used for the crafty snake. It's a play on words in Hebrew indicating a connection between this part and the next part of the story. Just like a concerto where the bass drum begins to beat louder and the flutes begin their trills, we must be prepared, because the main part of the Opus is coming. And now we see it, or rather see him. A smooth, crafty, intelligent serpent slithers his way among the trees of the garden. The author describes him as "more crafty" or "more intelligent" than any other animal in the garden. The first words from his mouth to the woman insight doubt. "Did God really say?" is the temptation for that moment and for all ages. The enemy attempts to bring doubt about God in several ways.

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- 1.) Doubt about his goodness. He has been so good to his people and his creation, but now doubt about his goodness surfaces.
- 2.) Doubt about his Word, and his truthfulness. If the snake can get the woman to doubt or mistrust the creator, then he is already winning the battle.
- 3.) Doubt about God's sovereign rule. The created being is tempted to think that he or she is in control and not their creator.

Temptation comes to all of us in that way today, "Did God really say?" We are likewise tempted to doubt his goodness, his Word, and his sovereign rule. In this season of Lent, it's important to reflect on just where the enemy has created doubt and mistrust in our minds. How has convinced us that we are the creators of our own little worlds? How has he been tempting you lately? Now, back to the garden.

The snake is not identified here in this story as Satan, other scripture passages reveal that identity. Isaiah 27:1 would later describe Satan as the "gliding or coiling serpent." Rev. 12:9 and 20:2 would speak of Satan as the ancient serpent, the one who leads the whole world astray. So, the snake, even though created by God for good has now under the control of a higher, more sinister and deadly power. But of course, the woman and the man do not know that.

The woman replies clearly and accurately to the serpent's test. She says that God has told them that they can eat from any of the trees in the garden, but the one in the middle they are not to even touch or they will die" (3:2).

"You will certainly not die," the serpent hisses. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Now the serpent is going even further beyond creating doubt. He is mixing half-truths with out-right lies. The truth is that they will have their eyes opened and will see good and evil. But the falsity is that they will be like God. They will never be exactly like the creator. They will always be created beings and not the creator. Furthermore, they are already like God. They don't need anything more.

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With this doubt, lies, and half-truths, the woman now looks at the tree and sees attraction and beauty. She sees that the fruit is good for eating. It is pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining knowledge. That's the way sin is. It is desirable and often looks good. It's deceptive. Wrong can be made to look right. In our society today, life

seems to be more about what makes us happy than living what is right and truthful. During this season of Lent we ask ourselves, What lies have we believed?

Now it's just a very quick instance from doubt to sinful action. Once the woman saw the fruit was desirable for food and knowledge, she took some ate it and gave it to her husband to eat who was also there. Notice that he is an accomplice in this action. He is just as guilty. The both eat of the forbidden fruit and as the snake said, their eyes were opened and they did now perceive that they were naked. So, they miserably try to sew fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves. Would you like to wear fig leaves for clothing? No? I didn't think so. They are a feeble attempt for covering. Now we turn to life in the garden after the tragedy.

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III. Life in the garden after the tragedy

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The consequences are catastrophic. We cannot overstate the magnitude of this epic fall in human history for all humankind and for Adam and Eve themselves. First, they realize that they are naked (3:7). What before was a beautiful expression of harmony now has consequences for both of them. They feel shame and fear (3:7). For the first time, they are afraid of God. When he comes walking to them in the cool of the day (evening), they hide from him for the first time. Before they were one with God and now they are alienated from him. Sin produces a gap between a loving, creator God and his created beings.

When God asks where they are, Adam replies that he was afraid because he was naked. And when God asks them who told them they were naked and if they had eaten from the tree that they were commanded not to eat of, the blame game begins. Adam, like most men, blames his wife. He doesn't even call her by name, but simply says, "The woman you put here with me [now it's really God's fault] – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (3:12).

When God turns to the woman, she blames the snake. "He tricked me," she says. And then God turns to the snake and here is where the judgments begin. God will deal with each guilty participant in order, but make no doubt about it, all are guilty. The snake will have to crawl on his belly and eat dust for the rest of his life. The woman will endure very severe pains in child bearing and the man will have to toil and labor all the days of his life with thorns and thistles. Even the land or ground will become cursed, even though it had nothing to do with these consequences. And finally, Adam and Eve would be banished from their lovely, attractive garden, never to return. From dust they came and to dust they will return, another reality to remember during this Lenten season.

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But the story doesn't stop there. Yes, there were terrible consequences and judgement for their action, but God also showed his people his grace. He showed his grace by providing leather clothes or garments of skin and he himself dressed them. I think I'd rather have leather clothes any day over fig leaves. What a graceful God we have. Second, he allowed them to live longer. They didn't die right away as he

indicated earlier. Even after eating the fruit for the tree of good and evil, they still lived a long time after that and became the parents of the human race. However, they did not live forever as they were originally intended to do.

The third way that God showed his grace was by promising victory to the seed of the woman over the seed of the snake. Even in his judgment, God shows grace. He said to the snake, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (3:15). It's one thing to be struck by the heel, but quite another to crush the seed of the snake. This is final victory language. Theologians throughout the ages have seen here God's foreshadowing of the victory of Jesus, the seed of the woman, over Satan, the seed of the snake. Paul references this very promise when he said in Romans 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." And indeed, Rev. 20:10 reveals that final act of Satan being thrown into the lake of sulfur and fire where he will be tormented day and night forever. That's God's victory of the snake and Satan. That's God's grace, given to Adam and Eve and to you and me, because we like them have all fallen astray from God's ways. And Lent is all about helping us to get back on the path.

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Conclusion

From the garden of Eden to the final garden of paradise, we travel from tragedy to triumph; we live through the folly of this world, by being faithful to our creator, so that we will one day triumph with him and live with him face-to-face again in all of his glory in the new paradise. During this season of Lent, follow him whole heartedly through tragedy to triumph.