

# Paradise Lost

The Rev. Dr.  
Peter G. James

Genesis 3:1-13

Sermon Series:  
God's Big Story

*That five-and-dime store on West Main Street in Canfield, Ohio, was my Garden of Eden.*

I lost my innocence when I was eight years old. I lost my innocence in a five-and-dime store. Five-and-dime stores no longer exist. They used to be convenience stores that sold all kinds of things at inexpensive prices. In its place today are Dollar Stores and Target. I remember my loss-of-innocence day like it was yesterday. It was a day drenched in sunshine. I distinctly recall the smell of that old building and the creaking sound of its hardwood floors. I had visited its toy section countless times. I lusted after a certain matchbox car. So, when no one was looking, I slipped it discreetly into my pocket. As I walked out of the store in the most nonchalant manner possible, the guilt must have been etched all over my face. Yet nobody said a word.

I took the car home and added it to my collection. But you know something, I never enjoyed playing with that matchbox car.

That five-and-dime store on West Main Street in Canfield, Ohio, was my Garden of Eden. It was the day I lost my innocence. It was the day I became conscious of shame. I was afraid, so I hid my diabolical deed from everybody. So here I am, 50 years later, finally coming clean!

We are preaching our way through God's Big Story—Genesis

to Revelation, in nine months. We've been focusing these past two Sundays on God's work of creation. Today, we shift from paradise enjoyed to paradise lost. In theological terms we call it "the fall." The fall of man is not only a Play Station 3 video game. It's not only a story about Adam and Eve's loss of innocence. It's our story, as well

Our story commences with a crafty serpent. The identity of this serpent is not revealed until the end of the New Testament. John identifies Satan in the book of Revelation as "that ancient serpent" (Revelation 12:9).

We're not told why this serpent approaches Eve rather than Adam. Some claim it's because she is a member of the "weaker sex;" others go the other way and identify her as the one in charge of the situation. Eve doesn't register surprise at a talking snake. Perhaps in the Garden of Eden animals and people talk with each other. These two might have had a previous conversation.

This smooth operator asks a seemingly innocent question in verse 1: "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the Garden?" He plants seeds of doubt in Eve's head. Did God really say? Instead of focusing on God's gracious provision of all the other fruit trees in the garden, the serpent exploits the single restriction of not

eating from the knowledge-of-good-and-evil tree. He wildly exaggerates the prohibition, making it appear unreasonable and restrictive. The serpent's question is intended to cast God in a negative light. Maybe God is being too restrictive. If God really loved you, would He limit you this way?

Eve is quick to correct the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit from the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die'" (3:2). In her zeal to correct the serpent's distortion, she goes a little too far. God never said anything about touching the fruit. It may seem like an innocent embellishment, but it paves the way for the serpent's next move. He now seizes the moment: "You will not die" (3:4). Can't you picture his feigned expression of surprise? "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be open and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." This serpent is not only crafty, he is brazen. He pretends to know more about God than Eve knows.

To set the record straight, there is no mention in these verses that the fruit is an apple. Figs are the only fruit mentioned in this chapter. Most likely the correlation between the Latin word for evil (*malus*) and the Latin word for apple (*malum*) has created the confusion.

We read, in verse 6, that the fruit looks delicious to Eve. The allure of a tree that could make her wise proves too tempting. Within

a span of eight Hebrew words in verse 6, they take the fall. "She took ... and ate; she gave... and he ate. Adam doesn't say a word. He doesn't register a single iota of hesitation. If Eve's sin is the sin of initiation, Adam's is the sin of acquiescence.

The serpent promised their eyes would be opened. Well, their eyes were opened all right. But instead of knowing good and evil, what they see is their own nakedness (3:7). This is hardly the kind of knowledge they were expecting. So, they sew fig leaves together as a sort of apron. Fig trees produce the largest leaves in Palestine and provide, shall we say, the most coverage!

Adam and Eve hear the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day (3:8). The anthropomorphic language intrigues me. God walks among them and talks to them. Their act of willful disobedience causes them to hide from God. Imagine, hiding from God! But hey, people do it all the time. Jonah took a boat to a distant port to hide from God.

God calls out, "Adam, where are you?" (3:9). Adam answers, "I heard you walking in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid."

"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Adam's response is classic: "The woman you gave me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate." Notice she's not identified as his wife anymore; rather she's "the woman you gave me." Now I get it. It's God's fault. The woman you

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gave me is to blame. When the spotlight shines on Eve, she attempts to exculpate herself by blaming the serpent.

Our story ends with judgment administered to all three guilty parties. The serpent is condemned to crawl on his belly and lick the dust (3:14-15). The woman will experience pain in childbirth (3:16). And the man will work the land by the sweat of his brow to produce food (3:17-19).

So what difference does this sermon have to do with my life? Three applications to this story come to mind.

1. This story teaches us about the nature of evil. Evil in this story is enormously seductive. Evil disguises itself to look attractive and appealing. The forbidden fruit looks positively delicious (3:6).

The devil distorts the very gifts God gives us—wine, food, sex, money, leisure, humor—you name it. That’s why evil is so powerfully attractive. It takes good things and exploits them.

So often we misunderstand evil. We are duped into thinking evil is always obvious, so much so that we can’t possibly miss it. We regard evil as something monstrous, like Dracula or Hitler.

The story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, written in 1886 by Robert Lewis Stevenson, is a mystery about two personalities who inhabit the same body. While Dr. Jekyll is a model of social class and professional excellence, Mr. Hyde is the embodiment of Jekyll’s otherwise hidden evil

desires. In the Victorian era in which the book was released, Mr. Hyde is portrayed as fanged and monstrous, as altogether different from us. But in the 21st century movie and TV versions, Mr. Hyde isn’t portrayed any longer as a hideous monster. He is suave and cool, a real man about town who happens to have a violent streak. In other words, he looks pretty much like us.

Some of you will remember in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, the devil is portrayed as androgynous and almost beautiful in appearance. Evil looks alluring and attractive. Evil looks normal, almost good. Would we be attracted to evil if we realized its hideous nature?

2. This story teaches us about the nature of people. Everybody plays the blame game in our story. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. And I’m sure, if given half the chance, this serpent would have blamed heredity or his environment.

Everybody has been playing the blame game on Capital Hill and Wall Street this week. We face the most severe financial crisis in 60 years, yet nobody is willing to accept responsibility for it. Everybody wants to lay the crisis at the feet of someone else. Democrats blame the last eight years on the Republican White House. Republicans blame a Democratic-controlled Congress.

Maybe we should adopt the attitude of G. K. Chesterton. *The London Times* asked a number of writers to contribute essays on the topic, “What’s Wrong with the World?” Chesterton sent in the

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shortest reply. In answer to the question, “What’s Wrong with the World,” he wrote:

Dear Sirs, I am.

Sincerely yours, G. K.

Chesterton.”

Maybe it’s time for us to take the blame.

The carrot the serpent dangles in front of Adam and Eve is the temptation to be like God. The offer to become like God can be intoxicating. Deification can look delicious. God told us, in chapter 2, that the knowledge-of-good-and-evil tree was off limits. Some things in paradise are off limits. God, in essence, was telling people that we can’t be God. We can be a lot of things in this world, but one thing we can’t be is God. Only God can be God.

The story of Adam and Eve is an indictment of the whole human race. They represent the whole human race. Sin has become universalized. In Genesis, sin builds a head of steam as it busts out from the garden to the world. Sin becomes contagious.

3. This story teaches us about the nature of God. I said from the outset of this sermon series that God is the lead protagonist in the Bible. The Bible tells us about all sorts of godly and profane people, but essentially this book is a story about God. God punishes in this story, but He doesn’t abandon people. Although we hide, God seeks. Since the beginning of time, God has been seeking people. “Adam, where are you?” is the first and primary question of Scripture. The rest of the Bible is

essentially commentary on this question. God will stop at nothing to win people back. Exhibit A is the cross. God’s sacrifice in Jesus Christ is proof positive that God will stop at nothing to win our love.

God’s Big Story is already coming into view. Genesis 1-2 tells us about God’s act of creation. Genesis 3 explains the deleterious effects of the fall.

Essentially, the rest of the Bible is commentary on God’s work of redemption.

