

Suffering in Temptation

Yesterday morning in the gentle rain, John and Patty and I played golf in Northbridge. Lovely and unhurried due to limited crowds, we enjoyed the ease of the course. Several times I wandered down footpaths, so slowly, they must have wondered about me. The gentleness of the rain had left residual raindrops on many trees, limbs, and even the furthest fingers of trees. Some plants in the regenerating bush areas were especially delightful to view.

In the outback a little plant grows called the "sundew." It has a slender stem and tiny, round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drops of liquid as delicate as fine dew. Woe to the insect, however, that dares to dance on it.

Although its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are deadly. The shiny moisture on each leaf is sticky and will imprison any bug that touches it. As an insect struggles to free itself, the vibration causes the leaves to close tightly around it. This innocent-looking plant then feeds on its victim.

I saw no 'sundews' yesterday, but the story reminds itself to me every now and then and certainly as we consider one of the most famous Bible stories ever told, the story of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Today's lesson is on temptations and we ought to hasten to add...the overcoming of it. Chapter three is both the story of suffering and the story of the Servant to come. This week we will focus on the suffering, on Satan, on the fall of man and the

resultant curse. Next week we shall see the overcoming, the Saviour, the Messiah who is predicted from the very beginning as part of God's buy back program.

Let's read Genesis chapter 3

American statesman Benjamin Franklin said, "It is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it." Adam and Eve are listening to him and can say, "where were you 6000 years ago when I needed you!" Hindsight as they say is always 20/20.

This story has been made famous throughout history in its retelling and its reshaping. Even Apple Macintosh computers made the little apple with a bite out of it an international icon for the PC generation. Temptation to Aussies may be an island where young buff singles live. It may be the flavour of a Baskin Robbins or Wendy's ice cream. Tempting, whatever it may mean to you, is a lure to get you to do what you should not do, in religious terms, it's design is to accomplish three levels of rebellion against God. They are to distort God's words either for prohibition or for exhibition, to weaken God's restrictions or we could say to doubt God's word, and finally to deny the relevance and authority of God's word. Distort, doubt, and deny. All three of these accomplishments will be the work of the master rebel against God, Satan himself.

John Newton said of the opponent of God, "Satan will seldom come to a Christian with a gross temptation. A green log and a candle may be safely left together, but a few shavings, some small sticks and then larger, and you may bring the green log to ashes."

Satan's original name and purpose however were quite different. In Isaiah 14 from verse 4 we read (read), he was the "king of Babylon" who was in charge of the music, pomp (religion) and ceremony. (4) He fell from heaven, the one who was the shining one (Lucifer) (12). We quickly see his desire with people to 'weaken the nations.' His "I will" section (13-14) sound determined, but fall miserably short of God's intentions (15) and declarations of the results. Lucifer becomes Satan, the resister.

Look at another passage, Ezekiel 28, from verse 11. The King of Tyre was 'in Eden' (13), perfect, and beautiful (12). He led music there (13) and the worship and religion of the Almighty. (14) In due course his hatred for God led him to be self exalted (17) which is the primary sin and the primary cause of all sins. My friend, and daughter of Jews for Jesus founder Moishe Rosen, Ruth Rosen says that everyone is either in recovery or denial on this one. Satan is then judged (16) and traffics in trade and the merchandise of talebearing and murder (16-18), reason is corrupted (17), and in due time after his departure peace is established and the kingdom (25-26, Romans 14.17)

That's a fairly lengthy and descriptive tale of the Origin of Hate, the Despiser of all that is Good, Satan.

So that's why he fell; why tempt me to fall?

Two things may help us here. One, the nature of God; two the nature of evil. First God is holy. He hates sin, and he has purposed to judge and remove sin forever. And he will remove all those attached to it. Why so harsh, you ask? Simply that sin blocks true relationship with God, and God loves us and wants to

be in such with us each day. Sin then is the enemy of God, more so than any being who brings it along.

Secondly the nature of evil is not to sin alone. The schoolboy who skips school will not give it a miss alone usually; he wants a colleague or two to join him on Ferris Buehler's Day off. When Satan fell he wanted the angels to join him, and one third did. (Rev. 12.13, 8.6ff)

The president of Panasonic wrote in his 1991 book, "In China's later Han era, there lived a politician called Yang Zhen, a man known for his upright character. After Yang Zhen was made a provincial governor, one of his earlier patrons, Wang Mi, paid him an unexpected visit. As they talked over old times, Wang Mi brought out a large gold cup and presented it to Yang Zhen. Yang Zhen refused to accept it, but Wang Mi persisted, saying, "There's no one here tonight but you and me, so no one will know."

"You say that no one will know," Yang Zhen replied, "but that is not true. Heaven will know, and you and I will know too."

Wang Mi was ashamed, and backed down. Subsequently Yang Zhen's integrity won increasing recognition, and he rose to a high post in the central government.

Human nature is weak, and we tend to yield to temptation when we think nobody can see us. In fact, if there were no police force, many people would not hesitate to steal. This is not to say that when we do something bad, we feel no compunction at all, just that man is weak and prone to yield to temptation. But even if nobody witnesses our sins, and not a soul knows of them, we cannot hide

the truth from the eyes of our conscience. In the end, what is important is not that other people know, but that we ourselves know. When Yang Zhen told Wang Mi that "Heaven will know," he meant that the gods would know what he had done in other words, his own conscience.

A person who sins neither in thought nor deed, and is fair and just, gains enormous courage and strength. As a leader, you need courage born of integrity in order to be capable of powerful leadership. To achieve this courage, you must search your heart, and make sure that your conscience is clear and your behavior is beyond reproach.

Konosuke Matsushita, founder of Panasonic in his book Velvet Glove, Iron Fist (PHP Institute, Tokyo)

When God made man and put him later into this Garden of Delight, Satan who was already judged by God and found wanting, fancied himself in a hostile takeover bid. He thought 4 things which we see in the curse later: 1) I shall wed Eve, 2) I shall be king of the world, 3) I shall walk uprightly and 4) I shall eat the world's dainties. But to each of those God had an answer, the curse in fact. See in verse 14-15, we read 1) there would be an enmity between the Serpent and the woman (no wedding), 2) cursed are you above all cattle (no king), 3) on your belly (not walk upright) and 4) eat dust (not dainties).

So we see Satan's purposes in temptation, to cause Adam and Eve to distort, to doubt and to deny God's words. Let's look at those one by one.

Satan offered three things to our First Parents: appetite, avarice and ambition, or the lures to the body, the soul and the spirit. They say in verse 6 " tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise". John later wrote "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1 Jn 2.16)

Sin plain and simply progresses doesn't it? She "saw it" (you want to yell with Franklin "stop it there mom!"), "she ate" (see how sin progresses?) and "gave it to Adam" (companion sinning again), and "he ate." (Not you too!)

Let's define sin as 'rationalized self-will.' Thus the temptation to sin is to both do what we want, no matter what God said, and then to justify it later. To pretend it was ok! The adulteress wipes her mouth and says, "I have done nothing wrong"

John Piper says that sin (lust for example) "gets its power by persuading me to believe that I will be more happy if I follow it. The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier." Remember our thesis for the book of Genesis, that God wants us to delight in Him and in His goodness and provision. The Garden of Eden means the Garden of Pleasure, and in this case, sin is the exchange of the pleasure of God for the pleasures of temptations that will make me happy.

Does it do that to you? Does sin make anyone really happy? In a way and for a time yes. Otherwise humans would have stopped long ago. The thing that makes men and rivers crooked is following the line of least resistance.

This might be a bit odd, but in 19th Century England, nothing was more impressive than a Latin reader was. Hear Spurgeon then on temptations. "What settings are you in when you fall? Avoid them. What props do you have that support your sin? Eliminate them. What people are you usually with? Avoid them. There are two equally damning lies Satan wants us to believe: 1) just once won't hurt. 2) Now that you have ruined your life, you are beyond God's use, and might as well enjoy sinning. "Learn to say no. It will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin." Charles Spurgeon.

Spurgeon reminds us, Eve was standing in the wrong place, near the tree, listening to the wrong person (Satan rather than God or her husband), and she got distracted from God's clear guidance in His word.

Next week we will see the overcoming of this evil, the promise of a Redeemer who in strength overcomes each of the three temptations, who himself does battle with Satan both directly and indirectly. We will see Y'shua, the Messiah who is whispered in chapter 3 here in verse 15 as the child of the woman and who alone can save us from our sins.

Final

There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is cowardice. Mark Twain.

So let me ask you... do you know God? Are you in relationship with Him? Have you fallen to temptation and now want to turn again to God, admitting to Him your failings and discovering His loving arms opened wide to welcome you back? Have you ever been born again to a living hope by Y'shua the Messiah, the Saviour who died for you and rose again? If not, today is your day. You can know Him personally and be brought near, brought into delight with God. You have to admit how you have failed and disobeyed Him. You have to come back to the God who loves you and wants you to be in great repair. Y'shua is God's answer for you, and we are going to pray just now, and if you want to receive His love and grace, His forgiveness of your sins, then join me with this prayer.

"Father I thank you that you created the universe. I thank you that you designed it as a place of pleasure for you and for us. I admit that I have failed you and sinned against you. I need your grace to overcome my errors, and I value learning more about you in these days. I repent of my sins and accept Y'shua as a once-and-for-all sacrifice for my sins. He wants to deliver me and make me born again. Thanks for that, Lord. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer, please send me an email (bobmendo@aol.com) straightaway, won't you?

Actual text

Gen. 3:1 ¶ Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

Gen. 3:2 And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;

Gen. 3:3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"

Gen. 3:4 And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die!