

## **God Never Gives Up: Rebellion!**

Gen 3:1-6, Ps 36:1-7

Good Morning! Last Sunday we introduced our new sermon series called God Never Gives Up. Over the next few weeks we're going to be taking a fresh look at the whole story of Scripture. Last week we saw that the Bible tells us a unified story, God is the main character, and Genesis one, the first chapter of the Bible, sets the stage for the whole story. At the end of Genesis 1 human beings were in Paradise. We'll call this Act 1—God's good creation. But that is not the world we see today, is it? Pastor Eugene Peterson, the translator of *The Message*, puts it like this—"a catastrophe has occurred. We are no longer in continuity with our good beginning. We have been separated from it by a disaster. We are also, of course, separated from our good end. We are, in other words, in the middle of a mess." That is a good description of our situation isn't it—in the middle of a mess. We see evidence of the mess all around us: and it's a mess that goes back clear to Genesis. Today we are going to talk about 3 things—the root of our rebellion, the consequences of our rebellion, and the hope we have despite our rebellion. The root of our rebellion, the consequences of that rebellion, and our hope even in the face of our rebellion.

The trouble begins in Act 2 of the Bible's story—this is where the disaster started, the catastrophe that tore human beings from Paradise. What possibly could have separated us from God? Believe it or not, it's the same thing that separates us from God today. It comes down to one important question. Who is the boss of you? Who is in charge of your life? Where do we find truth? In thinking about that question of truth and opinion, of course I immediately thought about bumper stickers! People are almost as likely to share their beliefs on bumper stickers as on Facebook! One bumper sticker was "I'm having an out of money experience." A minivan had this bumper sticker: I used to be cool. I can relate to that! One said "accept that some days you're the pigeon and some days you are the statue. One that seems particularly relevant on Utah roads: I bet Jesus would have used his turn signals.

One bumper sticker I remember from college was Question authority. That was really attractive to me—Right on! Question authority! Don't let the MAN tell you what to think! There were other "Question" bumper stickers that I liked too—one was question reality! I remember thinking I'd like one that just said "Question." Question everything! Be your own person—decide for yourself what you think! What could be better?

I thought Questioning Authority was a cool new idea back in college. Actually, it was just new to me. It is one of the very oldest ideas! It goes back to our scripture today from Genesis chapter 3.

Here are the first people, living in a literal paradise. They have everything thing they could want. They have good food, interesting work, they are close to God, they are happy. At the end of chapter two it says that they felt no shame. Can you image such a life?

But then. There is always a "But then," isn't there? Suddenly we encounter a mysterious creature who is whispering. Whispering to Adam and Eve but also whispering in our ears today: "Did God really say . . ." "Can you trust him? Do you have it right?" And all of the whispers circling around the terrible lie we talked about with the kids—"Do you *really* think God loves *you*?" This whispering voice is very clever and very subtle—it plays on our doubts and it lies easily—"you will not surely die." The whispers imply that God is somehow holding out on us—that God doesn't have our best at heart, that we can't trust God. The whispering, slithery voice focuses on the one thing that was forbidden—The fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. "You should eat it—if you did you'd know everything, you'd be like God!"

Notice that the temptation is to be like God. See how mixed up the people are already? They were ALREADY like God! They were the ones made in God's image! But the temptation is really not to be "like" God, but to replace him. To be our own gods, to be the boss of me. Eugene Peterson says that desire to be with God is debased into a greed to be God. We turn from the living, loving God and listen instead to an impersonal serpent. We run from the shining face of God for a slithery world of lies where WE can be the main character instead of God.

That is the root of our rebellion against God, our sin. We don't trust God. We don't trust him to give us good rules or to keep his promises. We want to decide what is right and

wrong rather than trusting God's Word for direction. That is *always* the heart of our sin—trying to do it our way rather than God's way. "I did it my way" is the theme song of our fallen world.

When my middle brother Bob was a toddler he was determined to not miss out and to walk and run like his older brother. Forget about physical development stages, he was going for it! He would fall and hurt himself so often my parents called him "bloody Bob" in honor of his many skinned knees and bonked noses. Bob was determined to do what he wanted! And heaven help you if you tried to give him rules—once Grandma told him "don't stick watermelon seeds up your nose!" Of course, that is immediately what he did! Soon my folks were off to the hospital for an xray to try to find that seed. They never did find it. My dad used to claim that it was growing in his head! Are we spiritual toddlers, or can we listen to the healthy way to live? Eventually we should all learn the truth of the saying—don't believe everything you think! Don't believe everything you think.

It is impossible to overstate how serious this rebellion problem is—how serious it was for Adam and Eve and how serious it is for us right now. Remember how God gave the humans a role to play in his good Kingdom? He put us here to be his agents, his stewards for creation. We are supposed to rule on behalf of the true King and to be God's ambassadors, his mediators here on earth. We are called to reflect his love and rule out into the world.

Adam and Eve were not merely sinners, they didn't just break a rule. God is not having a temper tantrum, he isn't a control freak. No—they didn't just break a rule, they rejected their fundamental roles as God's stewards and representatives on earth. They already had all the power and authority anyone could want, but they threw it all away in hopes of becoming gods themselves. Instead of representing God's presence to the serpent, they took the creature's advice and tried to elevate themselves to God's position. They weren't just sinners in the garden, they were *usurpers* in the garden! They were usurpers rebelling against God's good rule and trying to overthrow his good kingdom.

The root of sin is our rebellion against God—our fundamental desire to be in charge ourselves rather than submitting to God's loving rule. This is still our problem today. You see it every time we run into a rule that we don't like. We start acting like Eve—making up reasons

to ignore what God said and to instead follow our own wishes. One of the classic prayers of confession captures this idea well—it says “we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep, we have too much followed the devices and desires of our hearts.” Too much followed the devices and desires of our hearts! We want to do something, so we come up with reasons to justify ourselves. “It’s not hurting anyone.” “Nobody will know.” “The heart wants what the heart wants.” Suddenly our desires, our whims are the measure of our behavior, not any ethical or moral standard.

We’ve seen that the root of our rebellion is our rejection of our God-given roles as his representatives on earth, shown by our attempt to replace God and become a law unto ourselves.

You may be asking yourself, what difference does it make? All the difference in the world. The fall from living under God’s rule to trying to make up our own rules is a disaster—for us, for the earth, for everything.

Look at what happened to Adam and Eve. First of all, they experienced shame. They immediately started worrying about being naked. They hid. They separated themselves from God. Before they had loved to walk with God in the garden, but now it’s different—they were afraid. They were ashamed. They hid. Sin always separates us from God—not because of how God reacts to it—he is still there, looking to be with us—but because of what it does to us. It drives us away from God.

Sin not only disrupted their relationship with God, but it broke their relationship with each other. Look at how quick each of them is to shift the blame. God asks Adam—did you eat from that tree? Adam immediately throws Eve under the bus—the woman gave it to me! It’s not my fault, it was her! In fact, he even tried to blame God—the woman *you put here* gave it to me. How can I be responsible for your mistakes? Just a few verses before Adam was breaking into poetry to describe this amazing woman, but not now! Then God asks Eve what she did and she blames . . . the snake! Some of you might remember the comedian Flip Wilson—that was always his answer to any criticism—“the devil made me do it!” Actually, the devil never *makes* us do anything, we get to choose. And we have to live with those choices.

Sin breaks our relationships—with God, with people, even with the earth. At the end of chapter three God describes the consequences of their sin. Instead of meaningful, joy filled work, there will be toil and thorns and thistles. Instead of Adam and Eve being side by side as co-rulers, patriarchy happens—man rules over the woman. That is not God’s plan, that is the result of our rebellion. These are not punishments from God, they are the natural result of sin. When we try to separate ourselves from God, it turns out we get separated from him. When we act hurtfully, people get hurt.

When Alice and I were first married we really looked to my brother and his wife as an example of a stable family in our generation. Then the day came when their marriage fell apart because of unfaithfulness. We were shocked. There was so much pain—to each of them, to their kids, to us too!—the ripples went out farther and farther. That was when I realized that the rule against adultery is not just God bossing us around—it is there for our protection. It is a rule like “don’t put your hand on the hot stove,” or “don’t play in the busy street.” Our actions have consequences and God’s law seeks to protect us from the hurt sinful actions cause.

You see, the consequences of sin is division, brokenness. We are made for relationship—to be in community with each other and with God. But sin drives us apart. It makes us suspicious and afraid and ashamed. Sin isolates us, it divides us, it damages us. We rebel trying to be our own boss, and we end up hurt and wondering how things got so bad.

But sin does not have the last word. The Bible is God’s story and he did not give up when Adam and Eve ruined things. No—what is the theme of the Bible? God Never Gives Up! God always pursues us in love. He is always reaching out to us, he is walking in cool of the evening, ready to be with us, if only we can let go of our shame and fear and sin. Even here in the Garden God lays the ground work for his rescue plan.

Right here in Genesis chapter three we get a little glimpse of what God will do; we get a glimmer of hope even in the middle of that dark, dark day. What is the hope? God says that the woman’s offspring will crush the serpent’s head. Do you hear that? God is saying that a descendant of Eve—a human being—will crush the evil one, will destroy the power of sin in the world, but it will come at a cost to that person. Right here as the catastrophe hits we see the foreshadowing of God’s plan to save us through Jesus!

This Act 2 about our Rebellion is tough, but we all live it out and repeat it all the time. We reject God's rule and throw away God's plan, but God never gives up. He has already given us a picture of his rescue plan, and next week we will see how he starts to put it in motion. But for today—take seriously this rebellion. Look for the places in you where you really want to be in charge. Those places where you are too much following the devices and desires of your heart rather than the Word of God. Look for where you are separating yourself from God, from others, from the relationships we were made to live in. And turn back—change your mind about those things. That is what repent means. Ask God for help—invite Jesus, the one who has already crushed the head of the serpent, to be your King and to help you follow his rule.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus—you know our hearts. You know how we are quick to make up our own rules and to justify our actions. You know the ways we pull away from you and from those you have put around us. Forgive us Lord. Help us to turn to you with all our hearts. Jesus we believe; help our unbelief. Help us to walk with you this week and to shine your love out into your world around us. In your name we ask it, Amen.