

December 27, 2009

THE PRICE, Part Three

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I don't know if you've ever had a "parenting moment" or maybe a "teaching moment" in which you've just wanted to pull out your hair and scream, "*What's wrong with these kids?*" but I know I have. Those of you who teach probably had quite a few of those moments just before the Christmas break.

I was recently invited to pray at an event for children. One of the first parts of the event was the singing of a children's choir. Those children from Pine Ridge Elementary sang beautifully, using their voices and sign language to communicate their songs. I was surprised and a little saddened, though, by the reaction of the many of the children in the audience: they talked and laughed and tumbled and ran around, making it very difficult to hear the children who were singing in the ceremony. To tell the truth, the adults were little better. It was as if no one cared about the efforts of the children who had set aside practice time, had set aside their personal stage fright, and had set aside performance time for the event.

All of this just goes to show that children have to be taught to be respectful; it doesn't come naturally. Politeness and manners are imparted to children through teaching and constant effort. There are many who teach and believe that people are basically good by nature. While there is some goodness in mankind because we are created in the image of God, there is also something broken about that image. We are broken people living in a broken world where sin comes naturally and where goodness, respect, propriety, and godliness must be taught and reinforced.

We have spent two sermons talking about the cause of this brokenness, the price of man's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. As a result of man's decision to disobey God, mankind and the world must suffer many levels of separation: we are separated from fellowship with God now and from His very presence in eternity; we are separated from ourselves in the forms of self-deception, conceit, and fears; and if that weren't enough, the day will come when every man will face death, at which point our spirit will be separated from our body. In addition, we are separated from mankind, starting on the family level, where we see it as manipulation, abuse, and selfishness, all the way to the community, national, and international levels--crime, violence, gangs, slavery, warfare, hatred of all sorts and in all forms separate man from man. Finally we see it in nature, where man was intended to be king. There is much in nature that we can still love and enjoy and appreciate, but nature is not at all to be taken lightly. There is savagery in animal, wind, and water. The world is broken.

I won't review the whole situation up to this point, but I will relate a story--a true story, just a short version of it. There was a king in ancient times named Croesus. He was reputed to be the wealthiest man of his day and possibly one of the richest men in all of history. To this day, we describe someone of unimaginable wealth as being "rich as Croesus." In 560 B.C., he decided to launch a campaign against the growing threat on his eastern border--the kingdom of Persia. Before going to war, it was customary to seek the advice of a fortune teller. Croesus sought the advice of the best fortune teller of antiquity, the Oracle of Delphi. The oracle gave him this advice: "If you attack the Persians, you will destroy a mighty empire." Croesus then gathered allies and launched his campaign. He engaged the enemy in an indecisive battle, and with winter coming on, went back to his homeland and disbanded his army. That was the way things were done back then: you disbanded the army in the winter, and then

gathered it back together in the spring. And you thought spring was the beginning of baseball season! Kind of gives a whole new meaning to “the crack of the bat,” doesn’t it? Cyrus, king of the Persians, had a different idea, though. He didn’t disband his army. Instead he lead his men over the mountains and into the kingdom of Lydia--King Croesus’ kingdom! Croesus lost. The oracle was right, but not in the way Croesus expected: “If you attack the Persians, you will destroy a mighty empire.” The empire he destroyed was his own!

That is what happened in the Garden of Eden. The woman believed the serpent’s lie, that she would be as God, knowing good from evil. She did learn evil that day, by personal experience. God, however, only knows good by personal experience. Eve learned the horrors of shame and guilt and deception and separation that very day, and that was only the beginning of the price that she and everyone else would pay.

We talked about the consequences in the previous sermon, but we left one out. We talked about what God said to the serpent, to the woman, and to the man. We must now turn our attention back to Genesis 3:15 and consider what God said to the enemy, Satan.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this verse. As incredible as it may seem, this is a promise from God that He would take the worst of the consequences of man’s rebellion *upon Himself!* Does that seem to be an incredible statement? God will pay the price for man’s sin. How can this be? Let’s explore this verse.

Remember, in the previous verse God had addressed the serpent. A serpent is a dumb brute, an animal, incapable of rational thought; it was, however, the tool of Satan. God cursed the serpent to crawl on the ground and eat dust as a reminder to humanity of the cause of the misery of our present condition. That was God’s pronouncement on the serpent, the animal.

But in verse 15, the pronouncement is directed at the enemy, the real serpent, the power that had infused and possessed a dumb animal as a puppet to deceive the woman. As we have discussed before, the Bible makes clear that the real serpent is Satan:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Rev. 12:9).

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years (Rev. 20:2).

Even beyond this clarity at the end of the Scriptural record, we can see just from this verse that God is addressing something beyond the limitations of brute animal. God promises that there will be enmity between the serpent and the woman. I could ask for a show of hands this morning as a response to the question, “How many of you ladies do not like serpents?” but we know I don’t need to do that. Most of you have little love for the critters. Is it true though, that all women and their children are enemies with serpent kind? Of course not. There are some people who love snakes.

A few weeks ago, the boys and I were pulling the long grass out of the playground area to prepare it for the new playground. As we were working, Wesley suddenly called out, “Hey Dad! A snake!” Sure enough, there was a small snake coiled up, poised to strike, right where he’d just been pulling the grass. I’m no snake specialist, and I couldn’t identify it, but I do know that baby snakes are deadly because

even though they have less poison, the poison they do have is concentrated. There are my sons, both of them, standing right over this little snake in fascination. They have been told what to do if they come across a snake, but they disregarded the safety precautions in order to get a better look. Does that sound like enmity? No--it's curiosity (which can be very bad for both cats *and* children!)

Humanity is *not* at enmity with snakes. If we were, one kind or the other would have been wiped out long ago. God is not speaking here to an animal but to the power possessing that animal. There absolutely is an enemy of the woman and of her children, and that enemy is Satan.

Let's repeat what God spoke to Satan: *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* There are several important things to note here, the first of which is the expression *her seed*. Throughout antiquity and into modern times, we have understood that seed is associated with males, not females. We see that all through the Bible. Why then would the Lord God associate seed with a female? As Creator, He surely ought to know the difference between a male and a female. The fact of the matter is that this is not a mistake. It is an early promise of a miracle by which we would know which specific Person to whom God is referring. It is the promise of the virgin birth. The seed of the woman would be a special Person with a special mission: *it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

This brings us to the second thing we must consider in relation to the original language used here. In the King James Version, we read *it shall bruise thy head*, but in Hebrew the word used as *it* here to match the gender neutral seed in English is actually *he*: that is, *He* shall bruise thy head. It's not that the King James Version translators didn't understand, because they clearly did in that they translated the next clause *and thou shalt bruise his heel*. That's a side issue, though. The point is that He, the seed of the woman, the one born of a virgin, would bruise Satan's head.

We have several expressions in English relating to the importance of the head. Have you ever "lost your head?" Maybe you felt like you were "a chicken with your head cut off." Maybe your coach told you to "get your head in the game." It's just kind of hard to control anything else without a head, you know? It's essential. We can lose any other extension of our body and learn to adapt. We can even lose all of the others and still function; but we can't do anything without a head. It is just this that God promises to crush--He, the seed of the woman, will crush Satan's operational power and control.

In God's pronouncement upon the serpent, He gave a promise of a Savior to break the control of Satan. This is God's promise; and we find the fulfillment of that promise in the Christmas story and all through the Gospels. God sent His Son to earth as the seed of the woman; He came to break the curse, to crush the control of Satan over humanity. This is summed up for us in Hebrews 2:14:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Jesus was bruised, just as God promised in Genesis 3:15: *thou shalt bruise his heel*. Satan did damage Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman. Satan and those under his influence set Jesus up as the victim of the most savage, most brutal murder in history, and Jesus died as a result; but "Death could not keep his prey." Jesus arose, and when He did, He destroyed Satan's power over us. Did it hurt? Yes, of course it hurt; and the wound crippled Him for three days, just as a bruise to the heel might be expected to do. This is the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15: *it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*. Jesus was wounded for us, but he destroyed Satan's control in the process, just as Isaiah 53 foretold:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5).

That verse says quite a lot, doesn't it? But there is more:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand (Is. 53:10).

Do you see this? The LORD--Jehovah God, the Father--was pleased to *bruise* Him, Jesus! He put Jesus to grief in order to secure the promise given in Genesis 3:15. Jesus was made to be the offering for our sin. His sinless blood was offered as an atonement before a Holy God so that we could go free.

The next part is revealing as well: *He shall see His seed*. In His death, He made it possible for us to have fellowship with God again. In Adam's Fall, humanity was separated from a holy God; but in Jesus' death, humanity can be restored to that same fellowship. We can be the sons of God. We are His seed!

There is much more to explore in Isaiah 53, but I think we've established the point that Jesus, the Messiah, the seed of the woman, came just as God promised He would, and did exactly what God promised He would.

Throughout the ages, those who have believed this promise of redemption have been God's children, His seed. Those who have refused to acknowledge God have a different father, Satan. Jesus said to His audience, "Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44a). Keep in mind that He spoke this to good, religious people--religious, but lost! And there is enmity between these two seed--so much so that when The Seed, Jesus Christ, appeared on earth and lived a perfect life, Satan's seed resented Him and conspired to murder Him.

I think it's most revealing that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and the miracle was reported to the chief priests and scribes, they immediately took counsel to kill Him. That's instructive for us, isn't it? Jesus, *the Friend of sinners*, was taken by wicked hands and crucified. Indeed, that is the very reason that He came!

The fact is that we all are sinners. We turn to Isaiah 53 one last time today to consider verse 6:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Yes, we are sinners; but for our sake, the Lord God laid on His Son Jesus the iniquity of us all. We are born in a state of hostility toward this message, and toward God Himself. We don't *want* to believe that we are sinners. We want to imagine that we are basically good and therefore do not need redemption. After all, we can all think of someone who is obviously worse than we are! But the fact is that we must accept the fact of our sinfulness and need of a Savior; until we do, we are hostile toward God. Paul puts it this way:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Rom. 8:7).

That's the bad news. The good news is that God loves us in our sinful condition and longs to reinstate us into fellowship. He promised this Redeemer on the very day that man introduced sin into the world, as we discover in Genesis 3:15. Paul also makes this plain in Romans 5:8:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

When we were at enmity with God, disregarding His love, His commands, His promises, He loved us in spite of ourselves and sent His Son to die for us. Friends, I will tell you this: I would gladly die for any of you, but I would not sacrifice my sons for anyone. Truly, God made the greatest sacrifice possible.

That, my friends, is the true meaning of Christmas. If you are still rejecting the message of sinfulness and of the Savior, won't you reconsider today? God sacrificed His Son for you, to bring you into fellowship with Him forever. Trust Him today!