

Genesis 3:8-15 and Mark 3:20-35
Pentecost 3B
June 10, 2018

“The Blame Game”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

To set the stage for our gospel today, here’s what Mark tells us Jesus has been up to so far. A crazy man in the desert baptizes Him. The devil tempts Him with food, worldly power, and protection from danger. Rejecting the religious elites, He calls uneducated fisherman and sinning tax collectors to follow Him. Evil spirits inhabiting a man in a synagogue call Jesus by name and Jesus simply says, (Mark 1:25) *“Be silent and come out of him”* and they do. He cures everyone in a city who is sick and oppressed by demons without resistance. He touches lepers, believed by society to be sinners, and heals them without contracting the dreaded disease Himself. He claims to have power over sin ... and He routinely disobeys the Sabbath! And crowds of people from everywhere, including the pagan lands surrounding Israel all follow Him and praise Him. If you were in charge of the religious education of the people, what would you say if such a man came into your midst?

The very religious scribes see in Jesus, a man with a ragtag bunch of illiterate followers who seems to be easily ejecting demons, standing up to Satan without consequences, and being praised by pagans from outside the chosen people of God. These leaders question the source of Jesus’ power ... obviously He’s in league with the devil ... in their minds, only a follower of Satan can have the kinds of powers to expel demons so easily as Jesus does. Only a follower of Satan can withstand the power of evil so easily as Jesus does. Only a follower of Satan can appeal to pagan masses that follow Jesus so loyally.

Jesus responds saying, (Mark 3:26-27) *“And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house*

and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.” Jesus announces for all to hear, “I’m not the strong man! I’m the stronger man! I’ve come to bind up the strong man and take what is rightfully mine!” Creation belongs to God ... He created it. But, Satan, by his slippery tongue, bound up creation causing it to be led out of God’s house and into his house of suffering, sin, and death.

Adam and Eve had done the one thing God told them not to do. Suddenly, they realized they were naked and afraid. So, they hid from God. God knew all along what happened but asks a couple questions ... maybe hoping Adam and Eve will come clean with an honest confession of their sin. Instead ... they begin the “Blame Game.”

Adam blames God and Eve saying, (Gen 3:12) “**The woman** whom **you gave** to be with me, **she gave me** fruit of the tree, and I ate.” It’s not my fault! She did it!

God turns to Eve. She blames the serpent saying, (Gen 3:13) “**The serpent** deceived me, and I ate.” It’s not my fault! He did it!

Adam blames Eve ... Eve blames the serpent. But God knows where the blame lies. It lies with Satan who tempted Eve by twisting God’s words. He convinced Eve to believe God didn’t want her to eat the fruit because He wanted to keep something good from her ... to keep her from becoming God by making her own decisions about what’s good for her and controlling her own destiny. She was hopelessly entangled in Satan’s lie. Eve was trapped, bound up, and led away from God.

Adam, failing to protect Eve from Satan’s trap, was snagged in the same trap. Through Adam and Eve’s fall into temptation, mankind has been bound by the strong man ... held captive in his house of sin and death ever since.

Satan entraps us and hauls us away into slavery in much the same way. He tempts us with the fruit of knowledge, trying to lure us away from God by convincing us that we know better than God what's truly best for us. He even mixes in "the good gifts" to make us think we're being faithful to God and His word. Satan says, *"God wants you to be best friends with everyone we meet ... it's important to not make waves that might make others feel uncomfortable about themselves and their behavior."* And friendship sounds good ... so some of us won't risk worldly friendships by lovingly correcting those who are falling into sin through their lifestyle choices, behavior choices, and who or what they turn into their personal gods. Meanwhile, these people we claim as friends are doomed by their unbelief in the one true God. Satan says, *"You can't afford to support those causes that alleviate suffering in the world and promote the spread of God's word ... you've got your own family to feed, kids to educate, and recreational activities to help you rest. Besides, it's not my fault they're suffering."* And caring for family and friends sounds good ... so some of us will politely decline those God calls us to help – maybe saying, "I'll pray for you" as we pursue our self-interests. Meanwhile, those in need are still in need while our focus on self-interest shows our lack of trust in God and His provision for our needs. Satan says, *"Go ahead immerse yourself with whatever crude language, questionable lifestyles, and excessive behaviors that makes you feel good ... nobody is getting hurt by them."* And that sounds good ... so some of us will condone vicious gossip, sexually abusive words and actions, and other behaviors deemed "okay" by our morally bankrupt culture. Meanwhile, people continue to be hurt physically and emotionally as collateral damage by rampant selfish behavior in the world. We may or may not be the actual perpetrators in these or other cases. But, when we are ... or if we fall silent by complacently doing nothing ... or blame others ... we are taken captive by Satan as we surrender to his lies ... the strong man has us firmly in his grip.

God is truly saddened by our captivity to Satan and sin. He also truly desires to fix the mess we've gotten ourselves into. Though (Romans 6:23a) *"the wages of sin is death"* for each of us, God knows where the ultimate blame for sin lies. God doesn't curse Adam ... though He does establish earthly consequences for his sin. God doesn't curse Eve ... though He also establishes earthly consequences for her sin. God goes to the source of sin! God curses Satan. And as He curses Satan, God provides the first glimpse of hope to Adam and Eve and all mankind saying, (Gen 3:15) *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."* Within moments of sin's introduction into human history, God reveals how He'll save His people from their horrible decision ... through the woman's offspring ... He will crush the serpent's head as the serpent hopelessly strikes at His heel.

Centuries later, the woman's offspring is born in the stable in Bethlehem. Almost immediately the serpent strikes at the baby's heel. But Matthew records how Satan only chases baby Jesus and His family to Egypt while wreaking havoc on the children of Israel through the jealous King Herod who murders all the baby boys born at the same time Jesus was born. Later, the serpent strikes at the grown man's heel, only to be chased away when Jesus turns away the devil's weak attempts at temptation in the wilderness. Finally, the serpent strikes at Jesus' heel again – Jesus is bound and led away to be tried for His claims to be the Son of God. The devil, working through his slaves, uses their lies to convict Jesus falsely and sentence Him to death. He is tied to a wooden beam ... dragged through the streets of Jerusalem to the top of a hill. There Jesus is bound by spikes to a Roman Cross and raised high. As Jesus suffers and dies on the cross, the weight of all mankind's sins bearing down on His back, it finally looks like the serpent has won ... until three days later. On that first Easter, Jesus throws open the tomb of

death. Jesus emerges alive – triumphantly defeating the effects of sin and death. He crushes the serpent’s head under His foot! Jesus renders the serpent harmless for all who believe in His promises of forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

The serpent, in his death throes, still strikes at the heels of God’s people ... you and me. But his attacks are futile. Jesus promises us, **(Mark 16:16)** *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* We believe ... we acknowledge our sin. We confidently confess our sin knowing **(1 John 1:9)** *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* In our certain belief in God’s forgiveness ... Jesus binds up the strong man who has captured us. Jesus plunders the strong man’s house of evil, sin, and death ... Jesus unbinds all who are captive to Satan and his lies. He has freed us from our captivity to sin and the eternal death that awaits each of us.

Thus freed from our captivity because of God’s gift of faith in Jesus’ work on the cross and His resurrection, He calls to us ... His brothers and sisters. He calls to us to do the will of His Father in heaven, loving Him and our neighbors through our loving words and deeds in a sin-filled world. We love by devoting our lives to God ... worshipping Him in our regular prayers and devotions. We love by lovingly helping people entangled in sin and unbelief through our words and deeds in the world. We love by sacrificing some of our own desires to support the weak and the powerless ... coming to their aid and protecting them from evil. We love by boldly upholding and supporting godly behavior and lifestyles through our personal lifestyle choices. In these ways and others, nourished and guided by the Holy Spirit, we do the will of God by showing the love of Christ to all in need. So they too might, by the power of the same Holy Spirit, be released from Satan’s shackles of sin and death ... come to believe and be baptized ... and join with us as His brothers and sisters here and in eternity.

May the Peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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