

PP The Two Towers: Thorns, Thistles and Field Plants, 8

11/8/2009

Text Genesis 3:17-20

Illus In the early days of push button radios, the children in families would often amuse themselves by listening to one program and then pushing the button that would quickly switch them to another station. One family was listening to the marriage ceremony of Queen Elizabeth of England to Philip. The minister said, *“Do you, Philip, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife...”*. The button was pushed and (believe it or not), the radio continued with a prize fight and the words of the referee, *“Shake hands, go to your corners and come out fighting at the bell.”*

Marriage can be a battlefield, and we saw the core of this in the last sermon in this series
The sentence to Eve struck at the deepest level of her womanhood, her life as a mother
and as a wife
And we’ll see that the sentence to Adam strikes just as deeply in the hearts of every man

PP 2-The Sentence to Adam (Men)

“And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you...” 3:17

This is the first time that the personal name of Adam is used, before this it was with the definite article, *‘the man’, ‘the Adam’*

PP His name means *red soil*, or *red ground*

Biblical names often reveal a person’s identity, their character

Adam’s identity is connected to the ground, the dirt, and the fields

PP To further see this, just look at the Hebrew word for *‘ground’*, *adamah*

‘Adam’ and *‘ground’* are linked just as we saw *‘man’* and *‘woman’* as linked together

And then God did something with Adam that He didn’t do with Eve: He gave the reason for His sentence

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you,”

He gives two reasons: one is obvious and it is the command of God that Adam broke

The other one is often missed: ***“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife”***

PP *‘listened to’* is a phrase that means to *hear with the intention to obey*

Adam listened to Eve’s voice with the intention of obeying, not discerning and leading,
but following

Her voice, or rather her opinions and desires had more weight for Adam than God’s did
Adam gave to her the place of headship that God had given to him

Men, are you the heads of your home?

Notice I didn’t ask if you were the dictator, or the harsh and dominating ruler at home

Not do you make every decision in your own personal counsel expecting your wife and
children to snap to it

But are you living out the role of courageous leadership in your families?

PP This is our role to live and it models the Godhead: ***“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”*** 1 Corinthians 11:3

It is vital to our children, for generations, that they see their fathers being courageous, gracious leaders

Some of you have never seen this, and it has damaged your perception of masculinity
The story of the passive, weak and nearly invisible father and domineering mother are regularly heard in counseling

At work, he is the leader, at home, a passive, silent follower, content to let his wife lead
Haven't you ever noticed the number of men in levels of management who can lead their companies, but flounder and waffle at home?

Do you remember Eli, who led the whole nation of Israel as their judge and High Priest

PP Yet he didn't lead his two sons as they ***‘were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.’*** 1 Samuel 3:13

PP Samuel, who grew up under Eli, modeled this with his own two sons whom he made judges over Israel: ***‘his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.’*** 1 Samuel 8:3

David, made King of Israel by Samuel, was a leader at the office but not at home
His wicked son Adonijah tried to take the throne of Israel while David was still alive and the bible lays the blame for this at David's feet of his poor leadership at home: **PP**
“[David] had never at any time displeased him [Adonijah] by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?” 1 Kings 1:6

Over and over, men who were courageous in their careers were absent leaders at home
Men, we are called to lead our families, and to do so courageously and graciously
Because Adam followed his wife rather than led her, and rebelled against God, He gave him a sentence that profoundly affected his and every man's identity

PP The Ground is Cursed

Let's reflect for a few moments on what Adam lost in his rebellion
The whole earth had been given to them for their pleasure and purpose
They had dominion over all of the earth, Eve as helper, and it was meant to give them a supremely satisfying and good life as they worked and kept it
Men, have you ever spent the day working outside in your yard and after you finished, you felt wonderful and satisfied?

That is a fragment of how Adam lived, every moment of every day

Imagine then, what went through Adam's heart as he heard God speak his sentence:

“cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” Genesis 3:17b

Note that it's not work that is cursed, but the object of his work is cursed
Adam sinned by eating the fruit of the earth, now the earth would not yield its fruit easily
We are called and commanded by God to work and it is a good thing to do
Work was part of God's perfect plan, given to humanity before sin entered the world

PP Work is one way that we follow after Christ: ***“My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”*** Luke 4:34

To not work when one is able and work is available is to corrupt the image of God in us

PP Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica: ***“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”***

2 Thessalonians 3:10

The church and the Jews had a very advanced benevolence ministry, and Paul says there are boundaries that a church must hold to in this area

Men must live responsibly before the Lord in the area of work

I grew up in central New York, the capital it seemed of unemployment and disability

We had many in our town who were and still are, living on life-long disability yet are riding 4 wheelers and snowmobiles, cutting wood and working on the side, all the while reaping benefits from the state

Friends, it is unethical to stay on disability and welfare and unemployment if we are able to work and have work available

‘But I’ll lose my benefits!’ ‘I make more on disability than at a job with minimum wage’

Trust the Lord to provide as you seek to honor Him in work; God will be faithful

PP The church needs to rise above the world and lead by example: ***“To aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”*** **1**

Thessalonians 4:10-12

Live dependent on no one, a burden to no one, showing ourselves examples for the world

In fact, I have cannot find even one Old Testament of New Testament admonition that a church is to provide benevolence to those who could work but won’t

We are to work in a way that brings glory to God and honor to His church

Men, it’s not work itself that is cursed, but the object of our work

But what does it mean for something to be cursed?

Is it a magical hex on someone or something?

PP *‘curse’* is the opposite of *‘bless’*, which means to put someone under the protection of God, enjoying His favor

PP When God cursed the ground, He removed His favor, protection and blessing from it
In chapter one, God had said, ***“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.”*** (1:29)

Now, He said to Adam, ***“in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life”***

And here we see that familiar word *‘pain’* from verse 16, meaning sorrowful toil

Unlike the serpent, neither Adam or Eve are cursed, it’s what they invest most of their time in

The sentence to the woman affected her role in her home with children and her husband

The sentence to the man will affect his role as provider and the place of his labor

Just as the wife will experience sorrow in these areas, the husband will experience sorrow in what he puts his hands to do

All of what he works to do is affected: marriage, parenting, career and friendships

He will experience thorns and thistles

PP a) Men, we will experience ‘thorns’

The object of our work will spring forth ‘thorns’

PP ‘Thorns’ are sharp, painful, uncomfortable obstacles that seem to be ever-present and get in the way of accomplishing what we want and need to
More than that, they prevent us from getting to the fruit that will satisfy
They are obstacles to satisfaction, obstacles to success
In our jobs, there are always problems, nothing is easy
Gossip, selfishness, jealousy in your workplace causes all sorts of relationship issues
Where yesterday you had a verbal agreement on that new contract, today it falls through because of greed and politics
Always feeling the pressure to perform, wondering if you’ll have a job next month
Doing the work you promised, and unable to get paid
Cars will need fixing, and homes repairing, and usually when we don’t have the money
There will always be ‘thorns’

PP b) Men, we will find ‘thistles’

PP ‘Thistles’ are luxuriously growing, flowering plants, that are covered with prickles
They look life-sustaining, but they can’t eaten, they look good, but are useless
Thistles grow in every career and are found in every workplace
The book of Ecclesiastes could easily be called *The Thistles of Life*

PP *“And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity...” 2:10-11*

PP In the next chapter he asks, *“What gain has the worker from his toil?” 3:9*

Solomon knew that the object of our toil is cursed, it can bring no lasting pleasure and satisfaction to us
It is only when Christ redeems our work, that it can be fulfilling and lasting
I recently talked to someone who uses the hours of autopilot time in commercial flying to look for opportunities to share and model Christ
A young lady who cleans home for a living and finds no glory in the labor, but deep satisfaction in sharing Christ with her co-workers
That new job is so exciting, but it doesn’t take long to realize that it carries with it God’s curse just like the previous job did

PP c) Men, we will ‘eat the plants of the field’

Adam’s food was no longer the delicacies of Eden, but the plants of the field
Jesus, in *Matthew 13:38*, explained in the parable of the sower, the ‘field’ is the ‘world’
Men, we are forced to eat the food of the world, but it is unfulfilling

PP *“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.” John 6:27*

The world’s food perishes and leaves our souls famished: possessions, success,

advancement, worldly pleasure
But Christ has food that is not from this world, and it can fill our souls with satisfaction
But His food isn't found in large bank accounts, and vacation homes, and cars we don't
need and ever-higher positions in our companies
That food is available to the poorest person, who, in Christ is full of satisfaction and joy

Illus Haiti

Ladies, there may not be a more identity-crushing situation for a man, than to be unable
to provide for his family
Adam's identity was found in who he was and what he was created to do
Adam bound together with the adamah, the person with his occupation
A man's identity is inextricably linked with his work
And without Christ as the center of our lives, these careers cannot bring us joy

Illus I think I first came to fully understand this on a hot June morning sitting at a trucking fuel
station below metro Atlanta. It was a little after 6 am, and I began to reflect on my life. Denise
and I were married, and our first child Matthew was about 8 months old. And though I was a
youth pastor, the church was unable to provide enough for our young family's bills, so I took a
part-time job driving a truck, cleaning port a potties all around Atlanta. Despite a graduate
degree, it was the highest paying part-time job I could find. That morning, I was driving the F-
450 dually pump truck to my first site, traveling down Interstate 75 where I exited and pulled in
to the trucking fuel station where the port a john was, and all of a sudden the entire vehicle
lurched and slammed on its right rear hub. And as I came scraping to a stop, I look to the right to
see both rear right tires roll on past me. The studs sheered right off the hubs.

I sat back in that truck waiting for a service truck to arrive and reflected on the next day's
headlines that almost happened: ***Pastor Perishes in Poop Pileup***
It was shortly after that incident that we were forced to move in with my parents where I
worked with my brother in construction
For an entire year, I battled with hopelessness and depression that Denise and I would
rather forget.
I discovered that my ability to provide for my family, my opportunity to thrive in a
career, was crucial to my self-worth as a man
And this difficulty pushed me to my knees before the throne of my Deliverer, Jesus
Christ
Pray

PP Application

This week, make it your goal to ***pray with each other every day***. Praying before a meal doesn't
count. Pray for your marriage, and especially as we move into the final part of the series, The
Return of the King. Pray for one other couple in our church in regards to their marriage as well.