

TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN, PURPOSE, AND DESIGN

"Tis Mercy All" Part 2 Genesis 3:22-24

August 25, 2024

INTRO.: How many here are familiar with the name, Vince Lombardi? He was the head coach of the professional football team called the Green Bay Packers. He coached from 1959-1967. In July 1961 he kicked off the first day of training camp for the 38 players on his Green Bay Packers football team. The prior season had ended in a heartbreaking loss to the Philadelphia Eagles after blowing a lead in the 4th quarter of the NFL Championship Game.

When the players came in to start training camp, they expected to immediately begin where they left off and work on ways to advance their game and learn fancy new ways to win the championship in the new season. When they sat down and began, Vince Lombardi held up a football and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football!" (hold up a football)

He then had everyone open up their playbooks and start on page one, where they began to learn the fundamentals – blocking, tackling, throwing, catching, etc. That was clearly not what they expected as players who were at the top of their game.

This hyper-focus on fundamentals allowed them to win the NFL Championship that season 37-0 against the New York Giants. Lombardi went on to win five NFL Championships, including the first two Super Bowls, in seven years. He never coached a team with a losing season after that and never lost a playoff game again.

One of my hopes in this sermon series, **TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN, PURPOSE, AND DESIGN**, from the book of Genesis, is that each of us would see how foundational this book is to life. Hopefully you have seen how applicable Genesis is to everyday life, and particularly, the culture in which we live. So, just as Coach Lombardi began training camp by holding up a football, I begin this morning with this foundational thought. Good morning, this is a Bible. This is the playbook for every believer, and we are once again going to delve into the playbook to learn of God's plan, purpose and design.

This week, is the second part of a two part message entitled, *Tis Mercy All*, from Genesis 3:20-24. This chapter begins by exposing the serpent as a liar and shows his mode of operation. He deceives (he is described as being more crafty than all the other animals created by God), he casts doubt ("*Did God really say....*"), he distorts ("*Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the Garden?*"), and finally he flat out denies what God has said ("*You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*").

This is followed by the recounting of Adam and Eve's doing what God told them not to, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's curses are pronounced on the serpent, God gives the promise of a deliverer, and the curses on Adam and Eve are detailed. The last part of Genesis 3, as we began last week, are the results of the fall as seen in Genesis 3:22-24. These are more than just results, for in these verses we also see the mercy of God.

Mercy is: not getting what we deserve

Grace is: getting what we don't deserve

Let's read the passage from last week again:

Genesis 3:20–24 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

As a review from last week, from verse 20; God showed mercy:

IN LIFE

What was to be the consequence if Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Genesis 2:15–17 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; **17** but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Death was the consequence for their sin. This was spiritual death (separation from God) and eventually, physical death. Yet, what name did Adam give to his wife?

Genesis 3:20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

The word, Eve, means life in Hebrew. The word, living, comes from the same root as the Hebrew word meaning "to live." It is in the future tense, although Eve had not, as of yet, born a child. In pronouncing the curse on the serpent, God promised there would be offspring from Eve.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and **hers**; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

We are reminded that every breath we take is a gift of God! Secondly, we see God's mercy:

IN DEATH

What did Adam and Eve do after they sinned?

Genesis 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Their solution to their nakedness was to sew some fig leaves together to make a covering. This man-made covering was not adequate. Adam and Eve's sin brought death to animals for them to be adequately covered. This is the first time they would have observed physical death. How horrible that must have been!

This is a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that would take away sin for all those repented (turned) from their sin and trusted Him to be their Savior and Lord.

Hebrews 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Any other covering for our sin will not do. Not good works, not religion, not because I'm better than most other people.

John the Baptist makes this declaration when he sees Jesus:

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who **takes away** the sin of the world!

"*look*." present tense. People still need to look to Jesus for forgiveness of their sin!

"*takes away*." present tense for there are no other options!

Who are you depending on for forgiveness of your sins?

This morning we will look at God's mercy:

IN BARRING, IN DRIVING OUT

IN BARRING

v. 22

Genesis 3:22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

God barred Adam and Eve from getting to the tree of life after they had sinned. Why is this important? Before we answer that question we need to look at God's reason for not allowing them to eat from the tree of life.

God says, "The man has now become like one of us..." The phrase "*one of us*," once again indicates plurality but a oneness as well. This points to the Trinity. How had they become like God?

God says, "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil." Is God saying that Adam and Eve were now equal with Him? That couldn't be farther from the truth. Prior to their sin, Adam and Eve had only known what was good. By rejecting God's command and direction they now knew evil. How did they show they now knew evil? Let's go back to the first thing they realized: they were naked. This had not been a problem before because their thoughts were pure and without lust invading their minds. Sin changed that immediately.

As Arnold Fruchtenbaum points out, the difference between them and God (and us and God) there is no power, in and of themselves, to "choose the good" or to "conquer the evil."

The Apostle Paul shares his struggle with sin, even AFTER becoming a believer.

Romans 7:14–20 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. **15** I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. **16** And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. **17** As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. **18** I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. **19** For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. **20** Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Why would it be merciful of God to bar them from reaching out their hands, taking from the tree of life, and living forever? Who here doesn't want to live forever? What had now infiltrated their life? SIN!! What is the consequence of sin?

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:1–2 As for you, you were **dead** in your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

In their current state Adam and Eve were spiritually dead with no hope of rectifying the situation themselves. If they were to eat of the tree of life they would be in that state eternally! There would be no way for them to come to know God's forgiveness through the deliverer who was promised in Genesis 3:15. Eating from the tree would not remedy what sin had done in their lives. If they ate from that tree they would be forever lost! Remember the definition of mercy: "Not getting what we deserve." If God gave them what they deserved, He would have let them eat of that tree and seal their lost fate.

Everyone of us has experienced the effect of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

If you have come to faith in Christ, think about what happened to bring you to that place in your life. What did God do that caused you to reach the bottom of yourself and turn to Him? For some, there were some very painful experiences that brought you to the place of salvation. Even if it were incredibly difficult, are you thankful that this pointed you to Jesus? Would you trade your salvation for a more comfortable life? How many here are praying for the salvation of a loved one and you wonder, "What is it going to take?" Are we willing to pray, "Whatever it takes, Lord. Even if it costs me." In God's mercy He barred Adam and Eve from the tree of life. We also see God's mercy:

IN DRIVING OUT

v. 23-24

Genesis 3:23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

Genesis 3:24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

God didn't request Adam and Eve to leave the garden. The idea behind "*banished*" and "*drove out*" is that of a forceful expulsion (Arnold Fruchtenbaum). There is a loss of fellowship experienced by Adam and Eve.

God didn't just drive them out of the garden. He also placed a guard on the east side of the Garden of Eden (cherubim and a flaming sword) to ensure Adam and Eve wouldn't be able to get to the tree of life. Cherubim were heavenly creatures mentioned 65 times in the Bible but only once in the New Testament. Their description would probably bring awe and maybe even fear.

Ezekiel 10:1–5 I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim. **2** The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city." And as I watched, he went in. **3** Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. **4** Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD. **5** The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

Ezekiel 10:20–21 These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River, and I realized that they were cherubim. **21** Each had four faces and four wings, and under their wings was what looked like the hands of a man.

James Montgomery Boice states that “the living creatures of Revelation 4 & 5 and Isaiah 6 are similar if not identical beings. Most of the references are to the figures that occupied either end of the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant of the Jewish temple.”

Revelation 4:6–10 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. **7** The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. **8** Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” **9** Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.

Isaiah 6:1–3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. **3** And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

There was also a *flaming sword* guarding the tree of life. “So now, this visible Shechinah Glory, the visible manifestation of the presence of God, was no longer a means of fellowship; but it was there to keep man out of the garden.” (Arnold Fruchtenbaum)

Why is this all significant? Who was in the garden? Adam and Eve, the animals, and God. What did their sin do? It drove them from the presence of God. Because of sin no man could look on God and live. God, in His mercy, removed them from the garden and made sure they couldn't get back in.

After the golden calf incident Moses wants to be assured of God's presence in leading the people. At the end of his conversation with God Moses asks God to show him God's glory.

Exodus 33:19–23 And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. **20** But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, **for no one may see me and live.**” **21** Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. **22** When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

1 Timothy 6:11–16 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. **12** Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. **13** In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you **14** to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **16** who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, **whom no one has seen or can see.** To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Their sin had separated them from God, and they could no longer look on God and live. They could no longer walk with God in the garden. God, in His mercy, drove them from the garden because of their sin but He has promised a deliverer.

Because of our sin, none of us can look on God and live.

In the Old Testament, God had the priests act as the intermediary between the people and God. Once a year the high priest would go into the Holy of holies, which represents the presence of God, to offer sacrifices atone his sin and the sins of the people. Jesus Christ came as the great high priest who's sacrifice on the cross didn't just cover our sins but took our sins away.

Hebrews 10:4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Hebrews 10:19–22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Sin also affects the life of the believer for it always breaks our fellowship with God. This reminds every one of us of the seriousness and awfulness of sin. The following verse is written to the believer. It tells us what we are to do after we sin and the fellowship with God is broken.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Positionally, when God looks on a person after they come to faith, He sees the righteousness of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

For the believer, some day we will be able to look on the face of God!!

1 John 3:1–3 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. **3** Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

By driving Adam and Eve out of the garden God showed mercy in communicating the awfulness of sin and the inability of them to look on God and live. Sin drove them from the presence of God.

SO WHAT???

Thomas Tarrants shares his testimony of being a former hate-filled Klansman who was saved by God's grace:

I came of age in the early 1960s in Mobile, Alabama, which had been segregated since its founding. In 1963, reacting to the federally mandated desegregation of Alabama's public schools, Gov. George Wallace uttered his infamous pledge of "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

I read some white supremacist, anti-Semitic, anti-Communist literature that was circulating within my high school. Then I met the people who were advocating these ideas. The civil rights movement, they said, was part of a Communist plot, and the US government had been infiltrated by Communist agents.

All these warnings made me anxious about America's survival, and my fears soon turned into hatred—toward those I perceived as America's enemies. So it was only a short step to getting involved with Mississippi's dreaded White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the most violent right-wing terrorist organization in the United States at the time.

One summer night, as my accomplice and I attempted to plant a bomb at the home of a Jewish businessman, we were ambushed in a police stakeout. My partner was killed at the scene. Four blasts of shotgun fire at close range left me critically wounded. Doctors told me it would be a miracle if I lived another 45 minutes. Yet God spared my life—to the astonishment of the doctors and the dismay of the police. If anyone deserved to die, it was certainly me.

At the end of a two-day trial, I was convicted and sentenced to 30 years in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. About six months after arriving in prison, I escaped with two other inmates. But a couple of days later, we were apprehended after a blazing gun-battle with the authorities, during which one of the other inmates was killed. Had this man not relieved me from standing watch about half an hour early that day, I would have been the one killed. God had shown me mercy once more.

Back in prison, I was confined to a six-by-nine-foot cell in the maximum security unit. To keep from going crazy, I read continuously. This eventually led to the New Testament, specifically the Gospels. But as I read the Gospels in my prison cell, my eyes were opened in a way that went beyond simply understanding the words on the page.

My sins came to mind, one after another. Conviction grew, and with it tears of repentance. I needed God's forgiveness. And I knew it came only through trusting Jesus, who had given his life to pay for my sins. One night I knelt on the concrete floor of my cell and prayed a simple prayer, confessing my sins and asking Jesus to forgive me, take over my life, and do whatever he wanted to with it.

As I read the Bible daily, a whole new world opened up to me, and I couldn't get enough! Early on, God delivered me from hate, and I began to grow in love for others. Friendships developed with black inmates and others who were very different from me.

After serving eight years in prison, an extraordinary turn of events resulted in a parole grant to attend university. That set in motion a series of developments which, over the next 40 years, led me first into campus ministry, then pastoral ministry in a racially mixed church, and finally to a long ministry of teaching and writing at the C.S. Lewis Institute.

As I look back over the nearly 50 years since God saved me, I can only thank and praise him that he didn't give me what I deserved. But because he is full of grace and mercy, he gave me exactly what I needed. He "is patient with [us], not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Source: Thomas Tarrants, "God's Mercy to a Klansman," *CT magazine* (September, 2020), pp. 79-80

*Have I come to know the God of mercy?

By delaying His Son's return, God is showing mercy to those who have yet to come to faith.

*From the challenge of last week, did I thank God when I woke up and before I went to bed at night?

*With whom will I share my story of God's mercy?

The Mercy Shop

Imagine an old European city with narrow cobbled streets and storefronts as old as the city itself. One of those weathered storefronts has a sign hanging over the door: The Mercy Shop. There's no lock on the door because it's never closed. There's no cash register because mercy is free.

When you ask for mercy, the Owner of the shop takes your measurements, then disappears into the back. Good news—he's got your size! Mercy is never out of stock, never out of style.

As you walk out the door, the Owner of the Mercy Shop smiles, "Thanks for coming!" With a wink, he says, "I'll see you tomorrow!"

Possible Preaching Angle:

Source: Mark Batterson, *Please, Sorry, Thanks* (Multnomah, 2023), pp. 63-64

The song by Casting Crowns: *It's All Because of Mercy*

... I could stand here

And try to tell you

I found my way here on my own

Brought to life this heart of stone

Made up my own mind

To change my own life

Workin' my own way to good

As if anybody could

... But the truth is I've been broken since my very first breath

And the truth is I've been wanderin' since my very first step

... I know the only reason

I can stand here unashamed

It's not because I'm worthy

It's all because of mercy

There's no way that I could earn it

Praise God, my debt is paid

It's not because I'm worthy

It's all because of mercy

... I still remember

The day He found me

6 feet under all my shame

I heard Him call me out by name

Hallelujah

The cross has spoken

Jesus my Savior bled and died

To bring this dead man back to life

... I'm just as desperate for you now

As I was back then

If I ever should forget

Remind me once again

I'm just as desperate for you now

As I was back then

If I ever should forget

Remind me once again

Oh, Hallelujah

It's all because of mercy