

This Week at the Creek

is an e-mail ministry of

the Church at Dyers Creek

DyersCreekChurch@aol.com

www.dyerscreek.com

(Jeff Wallace, pastor)

(Verlon Pritchett, associate pastor)

Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

Right Back Where We Started From

Genesis 3:1-7

January 7, 2007

A few days prior to getting married, the young groom-to-be went to his father and said, "I'm a bit apprehensive about getting married, Dad." "Why's that, son?" "Well, you know, I've got terribly smelly feet, and it'll be so embarrassing when my wife finds out." "Don't worry about it, son. Just be sure to go to bed with your socks on, and she'll never notice the smell. You'll be fine."

Meanwhile, the young bride-to-be goes to her mother and tells her, "I'm a bit worried about getting married, Mom, because, you know, I've got terrible bad breath in the mornings, and it'll be so embarrassing when my husband finds out." "Don't worry, dear. All you need to do is be sure not to open your mouth first thing in the morning. Don't say a single word until you've been to the bathroom and brushed your teeth."

So the wedding goes off fine, and for six months they each manage to keep their secrets safe. Then one morning at about five, the young husband wakes up realizing one of his socks has come off in bed. Frantically, he rummages under the bed sheets trying to find his elusive smelly sock – all of which wakes up his young wife. As he pops his head out from under the blankets, she says to him, "What on earth are you doing?" Eyes wide open now, he replies, "Oh my goodness! You've eaten my sock!"

Which just goes to show you that you can't keep your nature secret forever. Eventually, your smelly feet or bad breath or sinful nature will come out! And our evil enemy will be right there to urge the whole event on. Frankly, there's nothing that brings Satan more pleasure than tricking or deceiving us into turning our backs on God. And that's what our **sinful nature** is all about. Satan's constant invitation over the course of time – beginning with Adam and Eve – has

been for us to give in to his kind of life and to give up on God's kind of life. That's his whole game plan.

And look at how he went about it with Adam and Eve (because he often goes about it in the same way with us today). Right off the bat he plays to Eve's sense of pride. He plants seeds of discontent in her by reminding her that she hasn't been allowed to have it all. He wants her to think that she and Adam deserve better, that they're on an equal par with God, that they're the ones who should be in control.

So the serpent formulates a question designed to get Eve to express God's command in her own words, not God's. Once he's got her to this point, he has her questioning even the Word of God. "Oh, come on!" he insinuates. "That's not what God really intended! Surely God wants you to be happy, doesn't He?" Then he moves to the next step. Using both half-truths and outright lies, he cons her into doubting the goodness of God. As he continues the conversation, the serpent steers it in such a way as to make God seem harsh and uncaring: "God just doesn't want you to become like Him; He wants to be the only one knowing everything."

From here, it's a simple slide – a natural progression – to questioning the very nature of God Himself. And once she arrived at that place in her mind, she was a cat in Satan's bag. Never once examining her own nature but questioning God's all the while, she gives in, bites into the tempting fruit, and gives some to Adam to eat as well. By so doing at that moment, Adam and Eve tossed aside God's special blessings for them, heaped disastrous results upon themselves, and flung the love and compassion of their Creator right back in His face as an undesired emotion.

Thus it was that the fall put God beyond our reach. Humanity's direct access to God had been cut off, and the inclination of humanity's heart continued to be evil. And yet there remained a seed of yearning within that desired to restore things to the way they were in Eden. Like Maxine Nightingale's song says, Adam and Eve wanted to get "Right Back Where We Started From." Remember the lyrics? "Love is good, love can be strong; we got to get right back to where we started from."

How could this have happened? How is it that we – as a part of all humanity – still turn our backs on God? The answer comes in two words: sinful nature. And perhaps that's best explained by telling you how a worm gets inside an apple. You've probably figured that the worm burrows in from the outside. But that's not how they do it. Ever notice that a wormy apple doesn't have holes on the outside? That's because scientists have discovered that the worm comes from inside. How does he get in there? Simple! An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later, the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out. Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and works its way out through a person's thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions.

The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated it, feared it, fled from it, grieved over it. Some of our grandparents agonized over their sins. A man who lost his temper might wonder whether he could still take communion. A woman who for years envied her more attractive and intelligent sister might worry whether this sin threatened her very salvation.

But that shadow has dimmed. Nowadays, the accusation "That was a sin!" is often said with a grin and a tone that signals an inside joke. At one time, such an accusation had the power to jolt people. Catholics lined up to confess their sins; Protestant preachers rose up to confess the sins of the church. But as I've heard Ravi Zacharias say, our culture has managed to kill shame. We've practically forgotten how to feel shame anymore – and that's a real shame.

Look for the word "sin" in our culture today. It now finds its home mostly on restaurant dessert menus: "Peanut Butter Binge" and "Chocolate Challenge" are sinful; lying and cheating and stealing are not. And as a result, our society now finds it increasingly difficult to understand salvation. Why? Because it doesn't understand that sin is what separates us from a relationship with God. Sure, people are willing to admit they've made mistakes or perhaps on occasion even done something wrong. But we don't need salvation from mistakes! It's become so difficult to bring people to the point of admitting that they are sinners anymore.

We must restore our awareness of sin, because if there is no sin, there's no explanation for suffering in the world and we know nothing of God. We must restore our awareness of sin, because we can't understand God's grace without a proper perspective of our own sinfulness. Awareness of our sinful nature inevitably brings a renewed appreciation for God's grace and compassion. For His compassion isn't only expressed in what He's done in each of our lives or in what He's done for the whole human race by sending His Son to die in our place for our sins. His grace goes all the way back to Genesis; because back in Genesis, when mankind messed up from almost the beginning, God didn't throw away this fallen humanity. He could have ended the experiment right there and been content with the world He'd made. But expressing love and compassion is just as essential to who God is as expressing His justice and holiness.

A humorous poem discusses things as they are sometimes said to be: Said one monkey to the others: / "There's a certain rumor, which can't be true, / That man has descended from our noble race. / Why, the very idea is an utter disgrace! / No monkey has ever deserted his wife, / Starved her baby and ruined her life; / And you've never known a mother monk, / Who'll leave her babies with others to bunk, / Or passing them off from one to the other; / Till those poor babies hardly know which one's their mother. / And another thing a monk won't do / Is to go out at night and get on a stew, / And use a club, a gun, or a knife, / To take some other monkey's life. / Yes, man may have descended from the noble cuss, / But hey, brother monkey, / He didn't descend from us!"

Yes, we human beings are the ones with sinful natures. That's why we're the ones in need of salvation. We're not capable of saving ourselves. Only God is. Willie Nelson said that the best thing about owning a golf course was that he could decide what par for each hole was. He pointed at one hole and said, "See that hole there? It's a par 47, and yesterday I birdied it." Problem is, we can't make up the rules for ourselves. God made the rules, and we've fallen short of them.

So where does that leave us? In need of a **Savior**. We're the ones who've been deceived; we're the ones who've disobeyed; we're the ones who've been driven from Eden. But right beside the tree of disobedience in the Garden of Eden grows the tree of life; we know that tree better today as the cross of Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, we've been provided an escape. All who put their faith in the Savior who was pierced on that tree are no longer under any curse, no longer under any penalty, no longer a victim of the fall. Jesus has made all things new! He hands us each new moment, saying, "My child, begin again. You're free to start again." To keep from forgetting where you came from, remember these words from Romans 5: "When we were utterly helpless, God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's judgment. For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of His Son, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by His life."

Let us pray: O God, we have no other means of escape but You; we have no other way out from under the curse but You; we have no other source of salvation but You. And so we come to You humbly, thanking You for loving us to the extent of shedding Your own blood so that we may be made right with You. In Your name.

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