

“Where Are You?”

*But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).*

Today’s reading from Genesis is one of the most important readings in the entire Bible. Here, we learn about the first temptation and we witness the introduction of sin into human experience. Here, we see the curses and consequences connected to the disobedience of our first parents, and here, in Genesis 3:15, we even find the very first promise of a Savior. Scripture simply makes no sense without this reading and in this text we find the key to understanding God’s plan for our redemption.

But, as we begin the season of Lent, there is one question from this reading that bears a closer look and it begins in verse seven where we hear the following: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:7-9).

On the surface this seems like a question any father might ask when he suspects that his children have disobeyed him and hidden from his wrath...but this isn’t any Father. In the book of Jeremiah, God says, “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind...Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?” (Jeremiah 17:10; 23:24). And repeatedly, the Bible tells us that God is perfect in His knowledge. He knows where we are and what we doing. The thoughts and feelings that we carefully hide from others are an open book to God. He sees what we do behind closed doors, He knows our secret sins, and God is the only one from whom no one can hide. *So then why does God ask this question?* Well, from everything God has told us about Himself in Scripture, we can be sure that it wasn’t for His benefit.

Adam and Eve had sinned. They had doubted God’s Word and disobeyed His command. They had rejected God and, in the moment of the fall, everything had changed. Where Adam and Eve had once been conscious only of God and of His loving provision, they were now *self-conscious*; feebly covering the shame of their nakedness with fig leaves. And where they had once lived in perfect communion and peace with God, they were now hiding from Him in fear. God’s question to Adam and Eve “Where are you?” wasn’t a question about their physical location; this was a relationship question. In these words, God was forcing Adam and Eve to see the reality of their situation. They were now separated from God (Isaiah 59:2). The relationship with their Creator had been breached. Their innocence and freedom from sin had been lost, their will was no longer free, and this seemingly unnecessary question was designed to show them just how far they had fallen. It was a question of ultimate truth for Adam and Eve...and today, it is a question of ultimate truth for us as well.

“Where are you?” Today, God asks us this same question. The setting certainly looks different from the Garden of Eden, but today we are in precisely the same situation as our first parents. In a thousand ways we have walked away from God. We have disregarded His Word and disobeyed His commands. We have doubted His promises and rebelled against His will. We have sinned, and instead of owning up to this truth and placing our lives in God’s hands, we have exhausted ourselves trying to deal with sin on our own terms. We justify and we blame. We deny and we hide. We cover ourselves with any and every excuse we can find, no matter how feeble. We do everything in our power to get out of the impossible situation in which we have put ourselves and yet, after all of our bargaining and blaming, we are no closer to God than Adam and Eve were as they cowered in their hiding place. And that is why God asks the question, “Where are you?”

You see, when faced with this question, we are forced to see the reality of our situation, and honest reflection on this question shows us just how lost we really are. In Romans 3, Paul writes, “through the law we become conscious of our sin” (Romans 3:20) and that’s what this question is all about. In His Word of Law, God continually asks us, “Where are you?” And it’s a question that our sinful nature hates because its answer requires an honesty that we fiercely fight against. The Old Adam inside of us wants to stay in hiding. Our sinful nature despises the light of God’s Word and it grasps and clings to anything that allows us to keep our sin covered up...even things that God intended for our good. So we bury ourselves in our work or family affairs, or we overindulge in food or drink or other addictions and distractions that can keep us from looking up. We put on a smile and come to church and pretend like nothing is wrong, and in all these things we are covering up the very sins that separate us from God and from each other.

“Where are you?” is a question that calls for confession; it is a question that requires repentance; it is a question that desires and demands truth; and an honest answer to this question is the first step toward a restored relationship with God. Our inclination to run and hide from sin makes sense, because even unbelievers have a natural understanding that they are far from perfect. *But there is no human solution to this desperate condition!* No matter how hard we try, there is nothing we can do to change our situation.

The truth is that God doesn’t want our attempts to fix the problem. Instead, His only desire is honesty. And the truth that the devil doesn’t want us to hear is that when we lay down our fig leaves and come out of our hiding, God is not there with a punishment, *but with a promise...*and it is a promise that He Himself has already kept. That is why our first reading is so important! In Genesis 3:15, God points to the One who will be born of a woman, to the One who will crush the head of the serpent and bring us into a new and restored relationship with each other and with God Himself. This is what the cross of Jesus Christ is all about! This is what Paul pointed to in today’s reading when he writes, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup>For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19).

And this is exactly what today’s Gospel reading shows us – that in Christ, God has done for us what we could never do! Adam and Eve lived with God in a perfect, plush garden and they lacked nothing. Jesus was alone in the wilderness and was hungry and yet when temptation came, Adam and Eve crumbled and Jesus stood firm. And where Adam and Eve attempted to cover the shame of their sin, Jesus allowed Himself to be stripped of every covering, to be nailed to a cross and to be raised above the earth in the most public and humiliating way possible as the sinless bearer of *your* sin! You see, He did all of this for you! And because this is true, today we can answer God’s question “Where are you?” without shame and with complete confidence because *we are with Christ!*

In Ephesians 2, Paul writes, “you were dead in sin...and were by nature children of wrath...But God, being rich in mercy...even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with him...For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:1-8).

“Where are you?” is the question of Lent. It is the call of a God who loves you too much to let you die in your sin, and in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus this question has been answered once and for all. So my friends, today in Jesus you can uncover your sins! Today, you can repent and confess to an all-present, all-knowing and all-powerful God who has vowed by His own blood that you are forgiven! “*Where are you!?!?*” You are with Christ! And you will be with Him forever! Believe and share this promise God makes to you today. Amen.

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