

The Waiting: The Prophecy Awakens
By Jason Huff
November 28, 2015
Luke 4:14-21; Galatians 3:26-4:7; Genesis 3:1-21

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Genesis 3:1-21. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 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. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 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." To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." 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.”

We don't like to wait. Fifty years ago, fast food virtually didn't exist unless you were in a big city. Now, every little town has a McDonalds and Chinese take-out. I remember as a kid calling Children's Palace and Service Merchandise hunting down a video game I wanted to buy, waiting weeks or months before it came in stock. Now, Amazon will have whatever we want to our doorstep in two days – and if it takes longer, we expect free shipping. The other night, we went to try a new restaurant and they had a forty-five minute wait. We were right back out the door. Now that speed limits are up to the states, some states are up to 80 miles an hour for the same reason – we hate waiting.

But this season is a time of waiting. Advent is about remembering the birth of Jesus and waiting symbolically for His arrival, just as generations past waited for the Messiah. Most of us don't mind a little bit of anticipation. We wonder what presents we might get or what food we might get to eat. (We wonder how big the credit card bill will be in January!) But big waiting? Not so much. We can't even wait for Christmas music, which is now on the radio November 1st.

We miss out because our ideas of waiting and celebrating are too quick. We are too ready to move on to the next thing. The traditional church calendar set aside the four weeks before Christmas as a time of fasting, prayer, and preparation. The season of Christmas is supposed to last from December 25th to January 6th! It's why we have the song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas"! That was when the feasts happened. Jesus' birth was so important, so necessary for our salvation, that the celebration in the early church went on for nearly two weeks! The Christmas station goes back to country on December 26th, and that's a shame.

This season, we're going to work on waiting. We will sing some Advent carols, the waiting carols, these four weeks, but we'll hold the ones announcing Jesus' arrival for Christmas itself. And we'll participate in the waiting as those who came before Jesus did – by studying the prophecies. We'll see why when Jesus came, He was the fulfillment of over four thousand years of promises – and how those prophecies give us a logical, intelligent reason to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be – the son of God, the promised Messiah.

Now I love prophecy. When some people go through difficulty and faith starts to waver, they turn to the comfort of the Psalms or the assurances of Paul. I turn to prophecy. Prophecy is my go-to when things get rough and I question what God's doing or why He's doing it. Because biblical prophecy is my assurance that God works in human history and continues to do so.

If I want wise platitudes, I can go eat a fortune cookie. If you want to learn some things about human nature, other religions will do OK. But I love Christ and I love His Father and I love the Spirit because they keep their promises *in reality*. Prophecy is the assurance of that. Now many religions have prophecies too; Judaism or Christianity don't have a lock on prophecy. But Judeo-Christian prophecy is very different from prophecy in other religions. I've studied bits and pieces of eastern religions, mainly from Japan, and their prophecies are never concrete like the promises God makes. They are like fortune cookies! What you get out of them depends on how you read them. Many Asian television series are based on folklore prophecies where the "chosen one" could make a wrong choice and turn out to be the bad guy. Some prophecy – you can't even tell if it's good or bad!

In comparison, God always keeps the promises that He makes in prophecy, and He is often so direct as to be shocking. Not all prophecies are like that – like the one in today's passage, some you could miss if you aren't looking closely and thinking like someone from the ancient Near East. But often prophecy is stunningly clear. While we won't look at them in this series, the prophecies related to Jesus' death are accurate with laser-like precision. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, written between six hundred and a thousand years before Jesus' death, talk about details no one could possibly know except by God. Even skeptical scholars who question the age of the Old Testament books have no answer for how they predict events with such accuracy hundreds of years in the future.

But prophecy is not just about knowing future events. They teach us much more. As we look over the next four weeks at some of the prophecies of the coming Messiah, we're going to look at not only what they tell us about Jesus, but what they tell us about God, how He works, and our relationship with Him. The prophetic, promissory words of God are still speaking to us.

So let's look today at what both Jewish and Christian believers agree is the first prophecy about the messiah: Genesis 3:14-15. We've heard the story before: Adam and Eve are tempted in the garden by the serpent, later revealed in Scripture to be Satan, the ultimate tempter of humanity. They fail the test. They eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And immediately they know they have done evil. They hide from God and try to hide their nakedness. They are a mess, and they don't know the half of it.

Because of their sin, they will eventually experience death. The woman is cursed with painful and difficult childbirth, as well as a difficult relationship with her husband. The man is cursed with painful and difficult work to get food from the ground, and it will always fight him. It's not a pleasant picture. And because Adam and Eve are the first of our race, all of us are under the same curse and under the same inclination to follow our own way rather than God.

But their curse is different from God's curse on the serpent. It would be easy to look at this prophecy and say, "Huh...I guess that's why I don't like snakes." But that's not it. We aren't sure what kind of serpent this is, but it isn't some ordinary lizard. This creature was Satan in disguise; it could walk and talk and scheme. This is evil incarnate. The first part of the curse is that the serpent will crawl on its belly and eat dust, lower than the livestock. This creature, once magnificent in its intelligence and stature, is reduced to being among the lowest of the low.

But the second part is the prophecy: "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." On the surface, it sounds like humans and snakes throughout the centuries. But dig deeper with me. Eve and the serpent will be at odds. She sees death at work when her firstborn son, Cain, kills her second-born son, Abel. Those who long for God's grace struggle with those who oppose God and His ways, those who refuse to acknowledge God and glorify Him. It is a spiritual battle for the ages.

But here's the funny thing. The seed of the woman does not strike the *seed* of the serpent. They seem to be parallel, but they aren't. No, the seed of the woman strikes the serpent itself. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head and finally bring an end to the suffering brought about by the devil. The seed is Jesus Christ, the messiah, who would come thousands of years after the fall of humanity into sin. As Paul points out in Galatians 3:16, Jesus is the one true seed, the one who remakes the human race and recreates us in His image, in His perfection and holiness.

God is promising, in this moment, just as sin and death have entered the world, that they will end. God will achieve ultimate victory over Satan. While Satan will have the opportunity to strike at our Lord – he will bruise his heel, he will cause Jesus to be crucified and suffer and even die bodily – Jesus will rise from the dead, crushing the serpent. All who trust in Jesus for eternal life will reap the benefits of His triumph over sin and death and the devil.

Many of us here tonight know the reality of being Jesus-followers. We know that in life or in death, we are embraced by Him. He is taking apart the sinful nature we cling to and replacing it with a new one, a nature that desires God's will, that desires to do what is right by God, one that shows the fruit of the Spirit's work. We are glad this prophecy came true. But what does this specific prophecy have to do with us? When you tell someone this week what you learned about God in church, what does it have to do with today?

Here are a few quick thoughts about what this prophecy teaches us about God and our relationship to Him. First is this: *God always has a plan*. The fall of humanity did not send God for a loop. It did not baffle Him; He did not have to work out a backup plan on the fly. No, God knew this course of events was going to take place, and He had everything ready for when it occurred – even the promise of eventual salvation. While He only shares the parts of the plan we need to know as He sees fit, the plan is always there.

God is never stymied by anything, any evil we do, any schemes we hatch. God has never been surprised by war or catastrophe. The terrorist events around the globe the last few weeks do not create a problem for God or keep Him from accomplishing His will. He will set all things aright, and He will use even those horrific things that He allows but does not condone for His glory. The biggest plan He set into action was through His Son, Jesus Christ, but no plan of God's is ever thwarted.

That should give us hope. God always has a plan for us too. His plan is that we be remade in the image of His Son. But He has other, smaller plans for us as well. He is not surprised by our struggles, our lack of funds, our weaknesses and sicknesses, even our temptations and our stumblings into sin. No matter what you currently face, do not give up hope. If you have put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a part of His plan, and He will come through for you in ways that are perfect for your salvation and eternal life. It may not go according to our plan, but it will always be according to His plan.

Second thought: *God's plans are worth the wait*. Several thousand years pass between this prophecy and the coming of Jesus the Messiah. Many, many generations lived in anticipation of a Savior who didn't arrive in their lifetimes. But all those who trusted in the name of the LORD are saved alongside us. God's plan is so incredible that it takes into account all people who have ever lived and desired to follow Him.

We live in the awesome part of history, when we know the name of the Savior, when we have the fullness of God's plan, not just God's law. There is no doubt that we who live with the Holy Spirit live in far better times. But Christ had to come at the perfect time, not in Adam and Eve's day, not in Abraham's day or David's day, not even in our day. He came at the perfect time in history the Father ordained.

We long for answers. We long to hear back from doctors, to hear back from churches considering sponsoring us. We long to know when the job will come through or when someone we've been praying for might have a soft heart and believe in Jesus Christ. We ache for those who are in misery and send boxes of toys and gifts, simple tokens, praying for greater help than what we can give.

We long for a world filled with peace rather than war, a world where we no longer have to argue about immigrants and abortion and health care because everyone is safe in the place they call home, because every person is wanted, because every person is well cared for. We don't have answers. But we have a God who will provide them in His perfect time.

You might have noticed that this sermon is entitled, *The Prophecy Awakens*. That's a take on the new **Star Wars** movie coming out in three weeks. It has shattered records already – it has sold over \$50 million in tickets and not a soul has seen it. For most of you, you probably shrug and think, “All that hysteria for a movie?” But for those of us who grew up on **Star Wars**, we've been waiting 32 years for the continuation of the story after *Return of the Jedi*. Will the new movie be worth the wait? I have no idea. Many people thought the prequels that came out several years ago now weren't worth the wait. All this hype may be for nothing.

But I can tell you this – God's plans are always worth the wait. He is always providing for His people. He will never leave or forsake us. The wait is for our own good. We learn what it is to be like God to be patient, to be long-suffering, to be merciful and not quick to condemn. God will come through. God kept His promises – we know it. We see the promise fulfilled in Jesus. If that promise has been kept, than every other promise God has made will be kept too.

Final thought, and an important one: *God's promises are fulfilled not because of our faithfulness but His*. Through the centuries, the rest of Eve's offspring haven't done a very good job of taking on the serpent. We still enjoy disobeying God for reasons we can't even fathom. If it were up to us and our faithfulness, no promise of God would be fulfilled to us. Now God issues warnings – as believers, we are called to righteousness, to following after God. As Paul says in his second letter to Timothy, 2:12-13, “If we disown Him, He will disown us; if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

So you've failed. You've done something wrong. You didn't study for the test. You should have given a better tip. You passed the buck, you lied, you stole, you cheated. You grieved God by sinning against Him. Repent. Turn back to God. And look up. God is still faithful to His promises.

As Lamentations 3:22-23 say, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Ask for forgiveness and you will receive it. Do not worry that you have thwarted God's plans by your sin. Should you sin? No! We should be eager to avoid it. But God will be faithful. Do not lose heart.

I am excited about the next few weeks as we anticipate Christmas together, as we look at the prophecies that point toward Jesus, and as we enjoy the forgiveness, joy, and love that God gives us. As we set our eyes on the Savior, as we practice waiting in glorious hope, we will know Him when He comes again for us, whether in this life or the next.