

THE CURSE ON ADAM

A Meditation on Genesis 3:17-19

Adam was called to guard and take care of the Garden. His vocation, like Eve's, was intended to yield great joy and satisfaction, but now it will bring him pain, blisters, backaches, sweat and frustration.

The curse on Adam can be divided into two parts. First, Adam is cursed with pain in his work. "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, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread'" (Gen. 3:17-19a).

When God finally turned to Adam to give him his just curse he must have been bracing himself. He was responsible for guarding the covenant, represented by the two trees—and he failed miserably. Adam may have thought that God was going to strike him down with a lightning bolt, because God was clear, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." But God said, "cursed is the...*ground* because of you." God's judgment *and* *mercy* is seen here.

God's judgment is seen in the curse that fell upon all of creation. Due to Adam's rebellion even creation groans. Romans 8:20-22 describes the curse that came upon creation, along with its hope for deliverance: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." So the ground is cursed, resulting in an uncooperative and harsh working environment for Adam.

Those of us in the industrialized west tend to forget that for thousands of years most of the people on the earth were engaged in agriculture for their livelihood. That is still true in many parts of the world today, although only about 6 percent of the American population is involved in growing food. Thorns, thistles, and all kinds of weeds have made the farmer's lot a hard one. Even with modern pesticides and farming machinery, agriculture is a demanding way of life. Sweat is now a common experience, and a secretion of the curse.

Even if your job is more mental than physical, it doesn't come easy does it? Reading doesn't come easy. Accounting doesn't come easy. Filing doesn't come easy. For me personally, I think I'd have an easier time climbing Mount Everest than clearing off and filing the papers that clutter my desk. Regardless of one's occupation, it involves varying levels of stress, struggle and sweat.

Yet in the curse, remarkably, we also see the mercy of God. That is evident by the fact that Adam is still standing—he's still alive. This is nothing but the sheer mercy of God.

In the second part of the curse God introduces death. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). God grants a stay of execution for a time, but eventually Adam will die, as he is still sentenced to death. Romans 6:23 cannot be evaded: "For the wages of sin is death." Thankfully, there's a second half to this verse: "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The lightning bolt of God's curse didn't strike Adam *directly*, but it did strike the second Adam, Jesus Christ, directly. "Christ re-deemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13).

The first Adam brought thorns and thistles into the world; the second Adam wore a crown of thorns.

The first Adam knew what it was like to sweat; the second Adam knew what it was to sweat great drops of blood.

The first Adam experienced sorrow; the second Adam was a man of sorrow, and familiar with suffering.

The first Adam died; the second Adam tasted death for all.

The first Adam brought decay into the world; the second Adam is bringing about the restoration of all things. "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out...that he may send the Christ...Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago" (Acts 3:19-21).

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