

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Rotten Fruit

Pastor Scott Dudley

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Scripture: Genesis 3:1-11

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'?"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but 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.'"

⁴"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶When 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. ⁷Then 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.

⁸Then 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. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Transcript:

Well, hello BelPres. Thank you for joining us for worship. My name is Scott Dudley. I'm the lead pastor here. We are so glad that you have joined us today for worship. Our scripture comes from Genesis chapter 3, and it says this. "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 certainly die,' the serpent said to the woman, 'for God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good from 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?'" So Holy Spirit I ask that you would use these next few minutes to help us understand this word better and how it affects our lives. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, if you knew that there was a very powerful person who had a plan to completely wreck your life, wreck your experience of school or work, wreck every relationship you have with friends or family or coworkers or fellow students, wreck everything, steal your hope and your joy. If you knew there was a person who had a plan to wreck your life, what would you do? Well, you'd probably want to know who it was, and you'd probably want to know what the strategy was so that you could counteract it, and you probably know where I'm going with this. There is such a being, his name is Satan and his secret weapon to destroy our lives is sin.

So let's talk about sin. Yay. A sin sermon. Isn't that awesome? We don't handle sin very well. McKayla is cheering for the sin sermon. We don't handle sin very well. We either minimize our sin or we maximize it and feel super guilty about it, right? Are there things that you've thought or done that if other people found out about, you'd be horrified? Do you ever wonder, "Why don't I do what I want to do? And why do I do the things I'm not supposed to do? And why is there so much do-do in my life?" Ever since COVID started, I've had this thing where whenever I start to preach, I feel this urge to cough and inside, I'm thinking "Don't cough, don't cough. They're going to think you have COVID. Don't cough." Right? And once I stop preaching, it's gone. Sin is like that. It's like the thing we're not supposed to do, we're just drawn to it. And we know it and we

feel shame because of it, which is why we get so defensive when we're accused of screwing up in some way, or try to shift blame.

I remember one time when our kids were little, I heard our youngest Lucy crying in the kitchen and I went in and my three-year-old son was standing there looking kind of guilty. And he said, "The door hit Lucy," nice passive construction of that sentence, right? Mistakes were made. The door hit Lucy. Our sin causes shame inside of us. And not only that, sin wrecks our lives. Our insistence on having things our own way puts tension into relationships. Racism divides us and keeps whole groups of people from thriving, lust objectifies others and can ruin marriages. Sin wrecks our friendships, churches, schools, businesses, marriages, it's wrecking our country. But God has a way out.

Last week, we started a sermon series on the phrase, "but God" in the Bible, which shows up all over the place and signals that God intervenes and brings healing and wholeness. And today we're looking at the first place where that phrase, but God appears, actually twice, in just a few verses. This is the first place it appears in the Bible. And the context is God has created Adam and Eve to live in a perfect world. But then Satan, in the form of a serpent, comes along and convinces them to do things their way, not God's way, which is what sin is.

And this story exposes Satan's strategy for wrecking our lives so that we can counteract it. But first let's talk about what sin is, okay? So sin, first of all, sin is not about eating forbidden fruit. It's about eating rotten fruit. God's commands are not about depriving us from fun and joy, they're about helping us to thrive. And since he made us, he knows better what is going to make us thrive. And sin is when the devil convinces us to do things that wreck our lives, which is why God says don't do them.

And second sin isn't breaking rules, it's breaking relationship with God or with each other. It's saying, "God, I don't trust you. So I'm going to do things my way." Dr. Tony Evans points out that in this passage, Satan in the form of a serpent says to Eve, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" And he uses the name God, but the rest of the passage uses the name of the Lord God. And in the original Hebrew, the word for God, Elohim, referred to God's power. But Lord God, Yahweh Elohim, referred to our covenantal relationship with God. So in other words, basically, Satan here says, "Let's talk about God, but leave out relationship." Be religious, but not relational. See the devil doesn't care if you go to church, as long as you don't have a relationship with God. Just keep it theological. He's just fine with that. But God exposes the devil's strategy so that we can counter it and experience his hope and his healing and his renewal and his redemption.

So let's walk through this story and see how to do that. Satan says, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" No, that's not what God said at all actually. God said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it, you will certainly die." So this is the devil's first sin strategy. Sin starts with a lie that we believe about God. Satan doesn't talk about the 99.9% of the trees they can eat. He talks about the one tree that was prohibited because it would hurt them. And again, the issue that's at stake here is who is better qualified to determine how to live the abundant life, us or God?

A couple weeks ago, I saw a man wearing a t-shirt that said, "You can't tell me what to do. You're not my daughter." And everything in me sort of resonated with that because it was like my daughter's around, they just have to go like, "Daddy, please." "Oh, have whatever you want. It's okay." The Bible says there a way that seems right to human beings, but it leads to death. We are terrible at figuring out, discerning whose path is going to lead us to abundant living. And Satan here makes God sound like the cosmic killjoy, out to keep us from good things so that we'll rebel against him and do things our way. And Eve completely buys it, completely. She says, "We may eat the fruit from the tree in the garden, but God did say you must not eat from the tree, from the fruit, from the tree in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it."

And this is the first, but God in scripture. And she misquotes God. God never said anything about no touching. Eve has bought Satan's narrative that God is the great forbiddor And so she adds a prohibition that God never said himself. She vectors from what God said just a little bit, but it has big consequences, which brings us to the second strategy. Satan's second strategy beware the vector. When we hear the word sin, we think of things like big things murder, theft, adultery, that sort of thing. But really it's the vector that kills us. The little sins that we don't even notice. And every sailor knows that a vector of even just one degree from your course is going to make a huge difference over time. And at first you vector just a little bit and it doesn't seem like you're really off course, but over time that one degree of vector takes you to a place you did not want to go.

And we see this in life all the time. You and your spouse get busy with career and kids and you stop really sharing from your heart with each other and conversations become more about logistics and all of that and you don't even notice it at first, but as the years add up, pretty soon, you don't even know each other anymore and you get a divorce. That vector killed you, or just a little bit of materialism. Just a little more car or a little more house than you actually need. But slowly you keep adding more and more. And pretty soon you have no financial margin because you've spent everything and you keep adding more, but you don't want to downsize your lifestyle because you've gotten used to it and now you're trapped and you need a certain income to keep it all going. That degree of vector way back when made a difference to. Beware of the vector.

So then the devil says, "You will not surely die." Strategy number three, undermine confidence in God's word. You won't die. Don't believe what he says. You can't trust that Bible. It's an old book. Lots of it doesn't apply anymore. You decide what parts apply and what parts don't. And then strategy number four, Satan blinds us to the consequences of our sin. You won't die. Nobody will find out if I do this thing. There won't be any consequences. This won't hurt anybody. There are always consequences to our sin. We can't spend all week sowing our wild oats and then pray for a crop failure on Sunday. There are always consequences. And Satan says, "You won't die. God knows that when you eat from it, you will be like God knowing good and evil." Well, that sounds like a good thing, right?

Isn't that a good thing to know good from evil? Strategy number five, Satan never tempts us to do something bad, it's always tempting us to do something that looks good. We wouldn't do it if it looked bad. Satan never says to us, "I'm here to destroy your marriage." No, no. He says, "See that other person? They understand you better than your spouse. Your spouse doesn't treat you right. This other person treats you right. Maybe you should be with them." Satan doesn't come along and say, "I'm here to make you greedy." He says, "You don't have enough money. You're not secure. You better not give any of that away. You better keep it." It's not greedy, it's just good financial planning. Sin always masquerades as good.

So Adam and Eve eat it. And then it says they realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. So they wanted the knowledge of good and evil and they got it good lost and evil gained. And the result is shame, right? Because then they have to cover over. Sin begins with a lie that we believe about God, but it leads to a lie that we believe about ourselves, which is I'm unworthy. I'm unlovable. I have something to hide. If people knew what I really was like, they wouldn't love me anymore. And so we start to cover all that over with all kinds of fig leaves, get into that amazing college, have that amazing job, right? Succeed, achieve all of that stuff to just of cover over the shame that we feel inside and hide it, or we think we're hiding it from other people. But God.

But God intervenes and asks three redemptive questions. And if we follow these three questions, they will lead to redemption and healing and joy and we'll put all that back into our lives. So the text says that Adam and Eve hid and then it says, "But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" And this is the second time the phrase but God shows up in the Bible and here it's the Lord God, so the relational component has been put back into God's name. And the first question is, where are you? And why are you hiding?

See, because contrary to Satan's lie, God is not a tyrant. He doesn't say to Adam and Eve, "Oh, I'm just going to wipe you out because I'm so angry." No, no, no. He goes looking for them. Where are you? And that question drives the entire plot of the Bible. The entire Bible is about a God in passionate pursuit of a creation that is frantically running away from him. And that culminates when God came himself in the person of Jesus to seek and to save the lost. And so the first step in reversing all of Satan's destruction in our lives is to turn and face the God who is pursuing us because he loves us. And I'll give some practical ideas how to do that in just a minute.

God says, "Where are you?" Then Adam says, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. So I hid." And then God says, question number two, "Who told you you were naked? And why did you believe them, not me. I didn't tell you that. The devil did. Why did you listen to his definition of you rather than my definition of you?" We get all kinds of labels, don't we, right? I'm dumb or unattractive or loser or not successful. All kinds of labels from other people, right? But God doesn't give us any of those labels. God says you are mine, bought with a price, paid for in my blood, holy and precious in my sight, redeemed, restored, renewed and precious to me. You are who I say you are. You can do what I say you can do. You can be who I say you can be. And if you would only listen to my definition of you, not all those other voices definition of you, you would be free of shame.

And then God says, "Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?" I always think that's kind of just amusing, right? Maybe? Right? And so this is God's third question. What have you done? And are you ready to take responsibility for it? Because see, it's not our sin that keeps us from God. It's our pretended goodness. Our inability to simply say, I have sinned. I screwed up. I did this. I did that. Instead we get all defensive. And we see that in this story. In the mother of cop-outs. Adam says, "The woman you put here, she gave me some fruit from the tree and, okay, I might've taken a little bite, but I didn't really swallow it. And I didn't like it. And let's not lose sight of what's really important here, God, she gave it to me. You see, it's her. It's not me. She's got issues. You need to be dealing with her and need I remind you, God, that you were the one who put her here. So I don't think you're really owning your part in this, God, because see, it's really your fault."

He blamed shifts and politicians do this all the time. It's the other party's fault happens in families and workplaces. I didn't do it. Joe did. The door hit Lucy. Mistakes were made. Sorry, I'm late. I ran into traffic. Oh, far out. You did not. You didn't leave on time. We don't own our sin. And the reason is we believe Satan's lie that God is not good. That he doesn't forgive and give us second chances and wipe the slate clean. If I really believe that I am a child of God, redeemed in Jesus Christ because he died to pay the penalty for my sins, so they are now forgiven and I am free of them, then I can confess to any sin. Of all people Christians should be the most able to say, "Yes, I screwed up. I sinned. I did that horrible thing. I thought that horrible thing."

If you have a hard time admitting your sin it's because you do not believe in the goodness of God. If you get defensive when accused of something rather than saying, "Oh my gosh, I don't think that's true about me. I hope that's not true about me, but I'm going to go to prayer, because if what you just accused me of is true I want to know it." If you don't do that when accused, you don't believe that God is good and that he loves you. And if you know Jesus, he doesn't even remember your sin. And that's the good news in this story.

A little later in the text, God says to the serpent, AKA devil, "I will put enmity between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head. You will strike his heel." In other words, from Adam and Eve, there's going to come a man who's going to defeat the devil. It's the first prediction of Jesus in the Bible. It also says the Lord God made garments of animal skins for Adam and his wife and clothed them. So even in the middle of their sin, God shows his love for them by providing for them and he himself covers over their shame.

And in order for there to be skin garments, something had to die. And so this is another prediction of Jesus who dies to pay the price for all of our sins and cover over all our shame, which proves he loves me. And when we experience his great love at a heart level, we sin less, not out of obligation or duty or fear, we sin less because we know if God loved me enough to die for me, he must have my best interests at heart so I will do what he says to do.

So practically speaking, how do we apply this? Well, first connect with God's love. Remember, the devil doesn't care if you do theology, as long as you don't have a relationship with God. So connect with God's love. Sometimes in prayer, I will just focus on the fact that Jesus is with me. And sometimes I feel him there and I feel his love. Worship is so important for me to help feel God's love. And when we feel loved, our shame goes away and we want to follow God's commands because we know they're meant to help us thrive. We are not powerless against sin. If we draw closer to God, the closer we get to God, we do less sin because we just recognize he loves us and we want to follow him because we know that.

Second, tell the truth. Sin is a lie we believe about God and ourselves. So what's the antidote to a lie? The truth. Be real with God about your sins and don't sugar coat it. Don't be vague. "Now, you know, Lord, I seem to have a problem with human relational adjustment and I underperform at networking." No, no, no, no. How about I wound people because I'm selfish. I am greedy, Lord. I'm obsessed with money. And the point here is not, is not to feel guilty, but to feel forgiven and free. And if you do not feel less shame and more joy after you confess your sins, you did it wrong. If you don't

feel less shame and more joy after you confess your sins, you did it wrong. Maybe you did it in a theological way but not a relational way. The point is freedom, not guilt.

I heard a story on the radio about a 10 year old boy and his friends playing baseball and they broke a window in an apartment building. All of his friends went away, but the boy went into the building, knocked on every door until they found the manager and told him that he'd broken the window. So the manager then took the boy home to his parents and said, "Look, you're going to have to pay for this window, but don't be too hard on the boy because he fessed up." Well, the manager left and the boy, his sister was there just delighted that her little brother was in trouble. And she said, "What are you going to do to Bobby?" And the dad said, "I'm going to get him a new bike because he told the truth." Regardless of how anyone else responds to your sin, regardless of how anyone else would respond to your honest confession of sin, God responds to your confession the way that father did with the boy. No I told you so. It's just love.

Now, that doesn't mean we won't have to face the consequences of our sin. We will. And we may need to make restitution to people we hurt. But with God it's just love and grace and mercy and forgiveness and new life. A young adult who's part of our church, I'll call him Andrew, told me that when he was in high school, he was selfish and didn't care about anybody. And just that messed up a whole bunch of relationships at school and at home. And one day Andrew was on a retreat with the high school group and he looked around the room and he thought, "I don't care about any of these people." And he knew that was wrong. So he started to pray, "Lord, help me to see them the way you see them.:" And he said after a little bit of praying, he felt the intense presence of God with him. And in his head, he heard God say, "Are you sure? Because that can be kind of weighty."

And Andrew said, "Yes, I'm sure. I want that." And he said, "Suddenly, when I looked at each person, I could feel the stories that were written in their heart. It was this supernatural empathy." And he focused in on one person in particular. So Andrew went over to this person, but the person didn't want to talk to him. After all, he'd shown no interest in him up to that point. So walked away, discouraged thinking, "How am I going to help this person if they won't talk to me?" So for the next six months, he tried to help that person. But it wasn't working because he was doing it his way, not God's way.

He said, "I tried to brute force a friendship rather than just get to know them." Plus God didn't say to help just one person. He said to help people in general. So he was messing it up. So then he decided he sent an email to this person's parents about his concern for this person and what they were going through. And as soon as he sent it, he knew that was wrong. And he said, "I had taken God's gift and used it to try to prop up my bruised ego, to feel needed and to feel important and to feel wanted." A

couple days later, he heard that that email he'd sent, had caused all kinds of conflict in this person's family because one of the things that this person struggled with was being, feeling alienated in their family. And that's what Adam had, or what Andrew, had put in the email. So a mess, right? Just a mess. And Andrew felt guilt and shame and embarrassed.

Two years went by and gradually through the help of friends and pastors, through prayer, asking for God's forgiveness, feeling God's forgiveness, he finally got the courage up to go ask forgiveness from this person. And the person said, "I forgave you a long time ago. And yes, that email you sent created all kinds of conflict in my family, but it also exposed hurts in my family that we weren't talking about. And we eventually started talking about them and it led us to a better place. And as a family, we got closer together." So even though Andrew screwed it up, God used it for good.

And Andrew realized his sin was that he took the gift God had given him, supernatural empathy, and insisted on using it his way, trying to force a friendship on someone, but he confessed it to God and other people, felt God's forgiveness. Felt the shame melt away. And then he learned better how to steward that gift. And now Andrew is a young adult and he continues to have this supernatural ability to just feel and to know what people are going through. In fact, he said one time he was with a group of people he didn't know and got a sense of these two people he'd never met and what they were going through and started writing down on a piece of paper what he heard God saying about them and then gave that to them. And they came back a little while later crying saying, "How did you know? This makes me feel so seen and so loved by God. I feel important to him because he saw me." And Andrew says, "I'm learning to use this gift God's way. Not mine."

Now that's not a story of some huge giant sin, right? Drug addiction or murder, which is why I told it. Because it's the kind of sin you and I do every day. Do things in our way, in our timing, force things on other people for our ego's sake, often telling ourselves in the process we're doing a good thing. Andrew vectored, just a degree or two. Created all kinds of pain for that person, because he did things his way, not God's way. And it even looked good. Andrew said, "I'm trying to help this person." You could even call it good, but really it was about him feeling important. It was focused on himself rather than on someone else.

The kind of sin you and I do every day. But he turned to God, told the truth, asked forgiveness and felt God's love, and therefore more inclined to do things God's way and reap God's greater reward. So where are you vectoring? Where have you decided you know better than God the way to abundant living? This week turn to the God who is passionately pursuing you and hear him say, "Those things you feel shame over? I took care of that 2,000 years ago on the cross. You are free." Yes, we sin. But

God came himself in the person of Jesus and paid the price for those sins. We hide in shame, but God pursues us and says, "I love you."

The devil accuses, our culture shames, our peers criticize, our insecurity lies, our guilty conscience nags us. But God. But God says, "Because of what I did on the cross, you are clothed in my goodness and cleansed by my grace, renewed by my mercy, transformed by my spirit sent forth in my might and you are beloved in my sight and my goodness is running after you and will not stop running after you because I love you. So come out of hiding. You are safe with me and I am here to set you free."

So Jesus, thank you that you paid the price for our sins and that because of you, they've been wiped clean, and you see them and remember them no more. Lord, help us to live in that freedom, knowing your love in a way that helps us want to do the things you say will lead to abundant life and, Lord, help the world to see that following you is indeed the best way we pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Genesis 3

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Which of the serpent's statements are true and which are false? Why do you think the serpent mixes true and false statements? What does that tell you about how Satan works?
- Compare Eve's response (v. 2,3) with what God actually said and did (2:9,16,17). How does Eve hedge, fixate upon, and amplify God's commandments? How does that play into Satan's schemes?
- How can something that sounds good -- the beauty, nourishment or knowledge conveyed by the fruit -- be wrong?
- Verse 6 says that Adam was with Eve during the entire temptation. Why do you think he was silent? What does this say about Adam's complicity in the first sin?

- What are the consequences of their disobedience? Compare verses 7-13 with the previous chapter. How has their relationship with each other changed? How has their relationship with God changed?
- How does God respond? What does he do for them? What does this say about the character of God?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?