
Where Are You

In Genesis 3 we read the story about Adam and Eve being tempted by the serpent (the devil) and their subsequent sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Realizing that they were naked, they covered themselves with leaves, and they hid themselves in the garden. Scripture records for us that they hid because they heard the sound of God's footsteps as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day. It seems that this was a regular occurrence, for God to visit with them, and it would have been normal for Adam and Eve to greet God with joy and pleasure. On this day of falling into sin, however, they find themselves unwilling and unable to face God.

If we would have to depict this scene, we might well show God with a look of puzzlement on his face. Where were Adam and Eve? Why didn't they come to welcome him to the garden, and why didn't they greet him with joy? Aside from the fact that we can be sure that God already knew what had happened, he would have known from their absence that something had gone wrong. Things were not as they were supposed to be.

How would God respond? Because he knew that Adam and Eve had sinned, he could have responded with anger. Not only had they turned against him in open rebellion, but they had brought sin into the world, and sin would from that point on, taint everything in creation. Nothing would remain untouched by the stain of sin. God had every right to be angry, and he could have summoned them to stand before them to give account of what they had done. He could have levelled accusations against them and became their judge and jury, condemning them to banishment and death. Rightfully, he could have responded in anger.

God had to respond to the absence of Adam and Eve, for he could not ignore what had happened. And God did respond. In the Hebrew, his response was only one word, "Ayyekah?" which means, "Where are you?" Instead of leveling accusations against this frightened couple, he asked for their location.

We might wonder what God's tone of voice was when he called out to Adam. Was it concern? Was there some frustration? Was there an undertone of anger? Was their love? I imagine it was all of those, and those words evoked a response in Adam. He told God that he was afraid because he was naked. Clearly Adam had come out of hiding, and he had to stand before God, the leaves he had fashioned for a garment barely covering him naked body. He was afraid because he was exposed to God. The fig leaves were not covering his shame, and he knew it. Hiding could not keep God from knowing what had happened.

I find God's first response to human sin to be thought provoking. Yes, God asked the question, but God knew where Adam and Eve were. They were not hidden from his sight. So, he asks the question, not to glean information but to challenge Adam and Eve. Where did this sin get you? Where are you now?

They were in the garden, but they were soon to lose that. Within hours of their being found out, they had been expelled from the garden, banished from the presence of God not allowed to return. Where did their sin get them? Nowhere where they wanted to be. From that point on, they could not rely on the

earth graciously yielding its produce; they would have to fight for everything, eking out their existence in an adversarial world.

Sin does that. What seems so enticing, so attractive, turns out to bring us to a place where we do not want to be. A husband grows close to a woman not his wife, engages her in a relationship, thinking it to be loving and warm and instead finds himself out in the cold, separated from wife and children. An accountant cooks the books, buying for himself a nice cottage with his ill-gotten gain in which he hopes to spend many weekends with friends and family but instead finds himself in prison, sharing a cell with someone who has no use for him. The sin which seems so attractive results in separation and banishment.

God's question to Adam and Eve is provocative. Where does sin get us? Nowhere good. Sin always separates, always divides, always leaves us out in the cold. It may seem attractive, but where we are after sin is not where we want to be.

But there is more to the question. God does not only challenge us to think about where sin lands us, but there is also a sense of invitation in it. Yes, God calls Adam and Eve to account, asking that they be honest about the misery of their situation, but he is also calling the sinner to himself again. They were banished to a place from which they could not return, but, at the same time, they were forced to recognize that they depended on God to provide them a way back. They could not return alone, and they could not return without his help. But in his question, God calls them back into his presence, and he gives them a word of hope. Yes, they will be banished, but God will not banish them forever. He will make things right again.

He calls to Adam and Eve in their hopelessness and despair. They evaluate their situation, and what they discover about themselves is not good. Further, there is nothing they can do, so they have to rely completely on God to bring them back. In that question, we can hear God letting Adam and Eve know that while they are banished, God is also calling them to himself again.

And that is the hope of the gospel. Sin results in our banishment. Sin never gets us anywhere good. Sin always separates, and sin exposes to us that we are weak and naked. But God does not respond as we expect, for when we sin, even though his question makes us evaluate our own foolishness, his question also encourages us to come before him and take what we deserve. What we find, however, is not what we deserve but, rather, in Jesus Christ, we find what we do not deserve but receive, his grace to bring us back to himself.

In a sense, God asks the same question of us when we come to believe in Jesus: where are you now? And then, instead of being banished, we will find that we are in his presence because he drew us there.

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