

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-13

Sermon: Invisible, but Real God

Translated by Melody Lee

1.

Life is full of gifts. Such as, being able to eat each day, having a warm home to reside in, a job where we can fulfill our vocation, hobbies, and travel. There are so many gifts given to us. If you think about last week's talk, we have been given a number of 'relationships' as gifts. I shared that relationships in the image of God, built on mutual respect and equal worth, makes those relationships beautiful and enriching. A relationship of perfect trust gives more stability and peace to our lives than any other gift. Some of God's gifts are tangible, and there are many abstract things that are intangible. However, sometimes things that make us feel our limits as humans are gifts to us. Tests, disease, and death are unavoidable human limitations. Through these limitations, we experience the existence of God. When we acknowledge these limitations, we have experiences in our lives that connect with God.

There is no greater gift in this world than a relationship with God. The purpose of God creating human beings in His image is to have fellowship with us. By implanting an important essence of God Himself in man, God desires to have fellowship with His creation. Unlike other gods in the world who use humans for their own satisfaction, God respects humans. God grants freedom to the first humans, Adam and Eve. All the fruits of the garden could be eaten. But God's freedom was a freedom with limits. He told us not to eat the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. There was a clear boundary between man and God.

The mystery of our life is because there are areas that only God manages and controls. A beautiful life can begin by recognizing the limits and boundaries of a human being. Because those limits do not limit our freedom, but rather become the chains that connect us to God.

2.

The reason God created the Garden of Eden as a temple was to have fellowship with humans there. Looking at the words of Genesis 3, it seems that God habitually visited humans in the Garden of Eden and had fellowship with them. When the sun set and in the cool of the day, God would walk with humans in the Garden of Eden. Clearly, God was invisible, but Adam and Eve could feel God's presence. After disobeying God's command, Adam and Eve knew that God would habitually visit them, so they hid themselves beforehand. Today's text tells the story of how the beautiful fellowship and solidarity between God and man was broken.

Theologians have put a lot of effort into interpreting many theological themes in today's scripture. For example, the origins of evil and the fall of humans. However, I think of this text as just a story, and I think the priority is to hear the message the author of Genesis wants to convey through this story. A story has a texture called a plot. As the story unfolds, conflicts arise and show how those conflicts are resolved. The person who tells the story through the resolution of such conflicts wants to tell us something meaning and lesson.

The story of Genesis 3 begins with the appearance of a hindrance, the snake. The snake is the saboteur. He is trying to break the relationship between man and God. The serpent's instruments of disturbance were fear and lies. The serpent cleverly distorted what God had commanded, and left humans in chaos. Looking at Eve's answer in verses 2-3, it seems that Eve was clearly aware of God's commands. However, the snake misled them with the distorted information. Verse 4 says that even if you eat the tree of life and the tree of

knowledge, you will never die. In fact, Adam and Eve did not die after eating the fruit of the tree. To some extent, what the snake said was right. But if you think about it differently, you can see that God had a different meaning when he said, "If you eat from the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, you will die." The death God spoke of was not a biological death that stopped breathing and the heart stopped beating. So what does God mean by death? We know the meaning of death all too well. It is a severance of a relationship. Death is a state in which intimate fellowship and relationship with God are broken.

3.

Relationships are characterized by growing and maintaining trust. The same is true of the relationship between God and man. The story of Genesis 3 is the story of how the trust between man and God was broken. It was said that the snake, who was the saboteur, used fear and lies to destroy the trust between man and God. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1) The serpent's question to Eve makes her wonder and arouses her suspicions. It brings fear. The serpent speaks with conviction as the deceiver. "You will not certainly die. For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Instead of acknowledging their limitations, Adam and Eve wanted to overcome them. They began to waver at the snake's questions and began to fear. A vague fear that they could not live like this overtook them. They began to doubt that God's protection was with them. They wanted to leave God and live their own life on their own. They started to have doubts about God, whom they can only meet through His voice. They wanted to rely on something that was definitely tangible. The snake they saw gave them more trust, and the tree of life and the fruit of the tree of knowledge that they saw before their eyes seemed to make them special. If you look at it, many expressions related to eyes and sight appear in the text. 'I saw the fruit of the tree', 'My eyes were opened', 'It was good for food and pleasing to the eye'. Throughout the Bible, God is wary of visible and tangible gods. The visible or tangible gods who guarantee us a sure future and success are called idols. Relying on and entrusting one's life to such gods is called idolatry.

It is also characteristic of us living in the present day to try to depend on something visible rather than an invisible God. In Adam's day, the fruit of the tree, which gave life and knowledge, seemed to them more certain than God. It seemed to be the fruit of the tree in the center of the garden that helped them overcome the limitations and fears of their lives. Today, the fruit of the tree of life has been replaced by health. Also, the tree of knowledge of good and evil has been replaced with knowledge or education. Health became an idol, and education and knowledge became a sure means of securing money. Furthermore, it makes us think that if we had money, we can secure everything, including education and health. It's a world where money is the best. The security of money seems to be much greater than that of God. In fact, it seems like money can do anything. Anything that tries to alienate us from God still deceives us. There is no future more certain than money.

I, my ego, is at the center of all of this. Fear and hardship enters our lives when we focus on our ego rather than God. This 'egocentric' is an important characteristic of sin. When we look at Adam and Eve in the text, there is only 'I'. "I... heard, I... hid,... I ate... I ate... I ate" (verses 11-13). The human being who has let him change his ego into a mode of dependence. What is absolutely necessary to depend on the ego is the idols and idolatry I mentioned earlier, because only those idols seem to be able to respond to my desires and give me satisfaction. .

4.

Have you ever sought the Absolute while acknowledging the limits of human beings represented by death? What kind of existence are we relying on in the face of various problems and hardships in our life? Have you ever faced the deep fear within you through those limitations? Is God the one who can lead your future to a good place? Fear of health, fear of career, fear of death, fear of old age, etc. How do you deal with all those fears? Are you focusing on God through your limitations, or are you all focusing on your ego?

Satan is still trying to separate us from God. "Is God really the one who can take charge of your future? Aren't we supposed to secure something that we can touch and not on a God we cannot see? If there is a God, how would you explain the chaos in your life? We must find a life that centers on you, not God." Satan promotes our fear with these words. The word for Satan, devil, comes from the Greek word 'diabolus'. The Greek word 'dia', meaning "between", and 'bolus', is rooted in the word 'ballo', meaning to throw. So the meaning of Satan is "to throw across", that is, "the one who divides." In the scripture, the snake is playing that role. As it was in the beginning, Satan is still trying to separate us from God. He wants us to rely on something visible rather than on our invisible God. He wants our focus to be on our ego and create distance between us and God.

John says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18). Perfect love casts out fear. Adam and Eve were the exact opposite of what John said. Complete fear drove out love and left only desire (Walter Burggeman, "Interpretation Genesis,"). When humans recognize their limitations, it is up to them to choose whether to choose fear or complete trust in God.

We must recognize God through our limiting circumstances. You have to learn how to depend on God through that limit. Rather, through the limitations of our lives, we need to draw closer to God and restore a close relationship with God. We must cast away the tangible false gods and come to the trustful and faithful real God.

5.

I'm sorry to share another story about myself. In 2015, I was called as a missionary, for which I had spent 20 years preparing. I went to the city of Xi'an, China with my family, with a dream of fulfilling the vocation I received in my freshman year of university. However, a week after our arrival, I found out that my wife was pregnant with our third son, Da-yul. And a month later, her wife discovered that I had a thick lump under my left ear. I brushed off her concern, but when my wife scoured the internet, she came up with the diagnosis herself. It's a disease called parotid gland tumor. She told a doctor at Sinchon Severance Hospital who suggested it would be best to have surgery. Anyway, she returned home just in time for Da-yul to give birth, and it was determined that I would need surgery. However, the doctor my wife found said we would have to wait six months for surgery. But miraculously, within a month, the doctor was scheduled to operate on me. I will tell you about this miracle later. I was operated on by the doctor and the tumor was surgically removed. However, the results were not good. They said it was stage 2 parotid cancer. I spent a week waiting for the results of numerous tests to see if the cancer had spread to my body. It was then that I first felt the limit of my death. Until now, for me, death was something that would happen at some point in the distant future. But death was so close before my eyes. It was so cold as I waited for the results. It was also the time of plum blossoms. Looking at the plum blossoms swaying in the sharp winter wind, the phrase "Is there a flower that blooms without being shaken?" gave me immense comfort.

As I faced my limit in the face of the existence of death, God began to appear. Like Job, there was a confession saying, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away, and we only praise the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21). It was a time of deep communion with God.

Last December our family was going through another hardship. For nearly 3 years, I had endured the difficult life of studying abroad in the western United States. Fortunately, it was nearing the end of my studies. However, as it was becoming financially more and more difficult, I decided to find a full-time work place. At first, I applied for a few positions as an assistant pastor, but they all turned me down. Maybe it was because of my bald forehead, but it seemed the senior pastors felt burdened by me. It was then that I experienced the limits of my career. Even when my current marriage partner, Ji-eun, rejected me on a blind date, I had this kind of confidence. "It's your loss, not mine." But as the churches kept rejecting me, I felt like it was my loss.

Then, in March of this year, a small church in the neighborhood where I was living asked me to come for an interview with the assistant pastor. During the interview, as I sat there with anticipation, the pastor in his mid-50s said something like this: "I think senior pastors would be burdened by your age and career. How about applying as a pastor in a rural or small town in America?". I thought to myself. "Does that mean you're going to hire me or not?" After that interview, I decided to face my reality and look for a church that was calling for a senior pastor. Just then, a church called "One Heart Church" caught my eye. Skipping to the middle of the story, I'm with you at One Heart Church right now. To be honest, at the beginning of June, when the One Heart Church was decided, we had decided not to renew the lease on our house. If One Heart Church didn't work, we had no choice but to pack up our bags and return to Korea. Tidying up the house and saying goodbye to the children's school when nothing was decided was no easy feat. Nevertheless, God is faithful and God is in charge of my life. I did not give up the conviction that I was a man of God. Rather, I received great comfort from God during this difficult time. As I jumped off the cliff, I felt wings sprouting from my shoulders.

6.

Some of you may actually be facing a number of limitations. It is natural for everyone, small or large, to experience their own human limitations. Rather, God comes to us through those limitations. I do not want to give consolation easily that those trials and hardships will be resolved well. What attitude should we take in such a limiting situation? Should we seek, rely on, and take solace in the moment? Or should I rely on a God who has been faithfully guiding me even though I cannot see it?

Even now, God is looking for us while walking in the garden we had fellowship with. He calls you by name and says, "Where are you?" and is looking for us. The true meaning of our life begins with restoring a perfect trusting relationship with God. Knowing more, living a healthier life, and building a better career doesn't make life meaningful. If I, the selfish ego, is at the center of that life, it will be futile no matter what conditions I satisfy. Rather, fear comes. "Does life become meaningful by living according to God's will? God is invisible, but will faith really work in my life?"

In order to solve that fear, people choose to forsake God and follow their desires. The destruction of the first trust relationship took place in the Garden of Eden. Will you choose the invisible novelty or the tangible false god? Which god will you follow with full trust? What are your choices?