

Text: Genesis 3:1-10

Theme: “Where are you?” – God’s first question

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi on 4th September 2011, 10:30am.

Generally speaking, most of us are used to asking God questions, but what we are probably not prepared for is God turning the tables on us. How many times have we asked God “Why are you taking me along this difficult road?” or “Why are you allowing this to happen to me?” There is nothing wrong with asking God questions, provided we do not become demanding or sulky if He appears not to answer us in the way we desire. However, God’s silence can be an opportunity to enter into a deeper trust in Him.

The first question asked by God in living memory was addressed to Adam in the Garden of Eden: “Where are you?” Some of you might be wondering why an all-knowing God would be asking questions as if to add to His knowledge. One of the reasons why God asks questions of His people is to help us explore the real issues of life which our hearts might be hiding. In 1 Kings 19:9 God asked Elijah the prophet, “What are you doing here?” If you read 1 King 19:1-9 you’ll discover that Elijah was fleeing from Jezebel out of fear! He was depressed and deflated after his great triumph on Mount Carmel and he wanted to lie down and die. As with Elijah, His questions shine a light on the matters which we might prefer to conceal. His queries gently uncover our privacy, not to shame us but to develop a rich and close relationship with us, where we are able to discover more of Him and ourselves in a deeper way. God’s questions may be intimidating but they are always intended to tilt us from despair and defeat.

So let us go back to the Garden of Eden, where our first parents lived. They did not know or need to know everything; they were created to live by trust in what God told them – His Word. Sadly they failed to do that and entered into sin. God created humans to be in relationship with Him and He honoured them with the freedom to choose whether to love Him or live independently of Him. One of the most devastating consequences of sin is not merely that it breaks God’s law, but that it also breaks God’s heart. So God’s questions must not be regarded as accusations but as the loving entreaties of a Father. “Where are you?” is a question of lamenting and aching. How many of us have heard our children ask this question in anxious desperation? Mum, Dad, where are you? Yet in Genesis it is not a child asking this question, but God Himself. It is the voice of abandonment, isolation and concern.

The preceding two chapters speak of God’s power, sovereignty and greatness. These chapters witness to God’s eternal existence and creation of this temporal world. Then we find the climax of creation... humankind. Human beings created in the image of God. Then comes chapter 3. There, the world is turned upside down and Adam and Eve were at the centre of the plot. Paradise was turned into a nightmare. Life turns toward death and living becomes existing. It is here we find the story of humanity’s rebellion against God.

The tempter offers our first parent a subtle temptation. If you eat of the tree of knowledge you will not die but instead, you will be like God. It’s like saying; God is a ‘kill – joy’. He does not want you to enjoy. He is a sadist. He is a liar. Disregard what He says and you will find how wonderful and happy life will be for you. You will be in perfect control. The serpent is so crafty that he professed to have a privileged insight into what God knows and thinks and to possess inside information on what God’s intentions were. The voice heard in the Garden of Eden is a voice to which we are still exposed. We should beware of those who claim to have

superior knowledge and mystical understanding not available to ordinary man and woman who sits humbly. We are in a society where everybody is looking for an excuse to do what they want to do. We want what we want so bad, that we'll do just about anything and listen to just about anybody to get it. It does not matter who is trying to convince you to move and act contrary to what God has already said, don't do what Adam and Eve did! Don't believe the buzz and hype. When you listen to the devil, he does two things:

1. He makes you question and disbelieve God's Word.
2. He makes God look harsher than He is.

Previously, God had walked together in a completely harmonious relationship with Adam and Eve without any sense of estrangement. But as soon as disobedience and sin entered into our parents' hearts, they started hiding away from God's presence. But Father God, unwilling to give up on that relationship, seeks out Adam and Eve. The question "Where are you?" is the issue underlying every other issue. Where am I in relation to God? Often, the roots of major problems are the difficulties in rightly relating to God, knowing Him intimately, trusting Him implicitly or following Him obediently.

One of the first things Adam and Eve realised after they had sinned was that they were naked. Adam had an interesting response to the question "Where are you?" It was: "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (Gen. 3:10). Prior to their act of disobedience their nakedness caused them no concern (Gen. 2:25). Clearly, the state of being unashamed had now turned to one of shame and fear. And the first thing they did was hide themselves from God's presence which they had previously enjoyed. On one level, how humorously futile is the attempt to hide from God? And yet, if we are honest, we too employ similar tactics sometimes. We attempt to hide from God in the shrubbery of respectability, work, family life and social activities, as much as in pleasure and self-indulgence. Remarkably, and perhaps surprisingly, some try to hide from God in the thickets of religion. It's odd to think that people trying to hide from God run to religion – but if there is no personal relationship with the Creator through His Son Jesus Christ, it is nothing more than rituals, rules and idolatry.

It is futile, almost laughable to try to hide from God. It reminds me of our grandchildren aged about 5 and 3 when they play 'hide and seek' The younger one who doesn't know how to hide would hide her face somewhere with the rest of the body showing and then announce, "Come and find me." The Psalmist rightly said in Psalm 139:1-24, especially verse 7: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"

It is futile running or hiding from God. Why would you do such a ridiculous thing when God, as loving Father misses you and wants you at His side? Remember the story of the Prodigal son and generous Father in Luke 15:11-32. While the prodigal son was still a long way off, "his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him (v.20). In this story, Jesus is saying that God is so eager to save and so ready to reconcile that He does not consider it beneath His dignity to run to meet any of His returning children. Many of us would expect God to discipline the erring child, but instead it was a loving, redeeming environment that he prepared for him.

Have you been running away or hiding from God? Where are YOU? Where are you in relation to God? Nothing can be more important than our relationship with our heavenly Father.

When Adam and Eve, overcome by feelings of shame, came out of their hiding place, God did not exploit their vulnerability and put them on display in scornful judgment. Remarkably, He made clothes for them. It was a divine provision. R.C. Sproul said, "Beneath the gaze of God, Adam found redemption, not annihilation. Adam experienced not only the share of judgment but the benevolent gaze of love." So, too, through the cross of Jesus Christ the Father calls us home, covers our nakedness and shame and clothes us in the righteousness of Jesus as a sign that we belong to him. To make garments of skin, as opposed to filthy rags in the form of leaves, blood had to be shed. Wherever you turn to, you can see that it is the blood of Jesus that covers our sin and nakedness and filth to make us presentable to God. The God who asks 'Where are you?' is the God who comes in the Person of His son to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10).

Conclusion

There is a story of a little girl who was born with a cleft pallet. She knew from birth that she was different. She looked different and talked differently. When asked about her lip she would often lie and tell others she had been in an accident. One day her life was changed. She was in the fourth grade and it was time for the annual hearing test. In those days, they did the testing by the student covering one ear and the teacher would whisper a phrase in the other ear. Most of the time the phrase would be something like "the sky is blue" or "the dog is black." This time the teacher whispered something new. She bent down to the little girl with the cleft pallet and whisper, "I wish you were my little girl."

God has been whispering the same thing since the tragedy in the Garden of Eden. To each of us who have rebelled against God, twisted God's purpose for our lives and missed the mark, God whispers "I wish you were my child."

Whether it is God walking in the cool of the day in the Garden of Eden or Jesus, walking the land of Palestine, carrying a cross to Calvary or Jesus, walking resurrected out of the garden tomb, the question is still the same: "Where are you?"