

Text: Genesis 3:13

Theme: ‘What have you done?’ - God’s third question

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Family Service on 18th September 2011, 10:30am.

We are going to consider the third question God put to Adam and Eve, in this case the one directed to Eve. The question was this: “What is this you have done?” (Genesis 3:13). It is a moral question. The question is to establish the fact that God holds each one of us responsible for our actions and the realisation of this is both wonderful and frightening. What we think and decide actually counts for something in God’s world. We are not just specks of dust floating through space - we are beings made in God’s image with the ability to choose, and sometimes those choices have a great impact on the course of life.

From the question God put to Eve, we begin to understand more clearly the tragic consequences of human independence and sinfulness. To read the third chapter of Genesis is like looking in a mirror. We see that what went on in the hearts of Adam and Eve is going on our own hearts.

Do you recognise the tendency in your own heart to avoid the questions God asks with a view to helping you mature? Or the tendency to run and hide when you have ignored or broken one of His laws? Or the desire to blame other people when you have done wrong?

“The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’” (Gen. 3:13b). When confronted by God, Eve admits the serpent deceived her and then she ate. That much was true, she had been deceived, and she did eat. The only problem comes when we fail to see that being deceived is sin in itself. It is sin to “...exchange the truth of God for a lie...” (Romans 1:25).

Not many people in today’s world are willing to face up to God’s moral and ethical question: “What is this you have done?” The whole idea of moral responsibility is regarded as archaic, a relic of medieval times or a Victorian mind-set. If we are to walk with God, we must have God’s mindset on things and it is the Bible that reveals this to us as His will.

Sin is regarded by some nowadays as a mere blip, a temporary fault, a loose connection. How can we be held responsible for a blip, a temporary fault or a loose connection? When we do away with God and answer only to ourselves, we are dehumanized in the process.

So, let’s analyse Eve’s answer in more detail: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” It’s like saying, ‘You can’t blame me, blame the serpent.’ This is like the growing tendency in our culture of ‘the victim mentality’. You often hear people say:

- ‘You can’t blame me for becoming an alcoholic – when I was young I was abused by my parents. I drink to drown my sorrows.’
- ‘When I was a child my mother used to hide my doll, which is why I later became a shoplifter.’

Some people see themselves not as agents, responsible for what they do, but as victims suffering from the hurts others have given them. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent. And who put that serpent there anyway? Once this process starts, it is not long before God gets the blame.

Adam and Eve trod their chosen path because they failed to trust that God loved them. They refused to believe that in forbidding them to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil He had their best interests at heart. The suspicion had taken root in their minds that God intended to withhold from them what might be to their advantage. Believing that, the next step was to yield to temptation.

This is why turning to God in repentance and faith (which is essentially trust) is the first step we make to receive His forgiveness and salvation. Consider your own life at the moment. How many times has the devil whispered to you, 'If God loved you He wouldn't have let that happen to you?' It is a strategy he used on the first human pair and it proved effective; so effective that he uses it wherever and whenever he can.

But God is a merciful God. He is the Father in the story of the prodigal son. He ran towards his son as he made a u-turn to return home. He made a feast for him and rejoiced that his son had returned to be reconciled to him. This is a story that ends well and this is how God wants to make our stories too. We can return to God and acknowledge our sins and at the same time His mercy and love. He did not wait for us to come to Him, but in Jesus Christ, He ran towards us to reconcile us to Himself. There in Genesis, God promised to send His son who would bruise Satan's head, but at a cost to his heel. In Genesis 3:14-15 we read: "So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you.....And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'"

When God spoke to Adam and to Eve, He asked them each questions. God didn't ask Satan, the being animating the serpent, any questions because there was nothing to teach him. The "friendship" Eve and the serpent seemed to enjoy earlier in the chapter is finished. There is now a natural fear of Satan in the heart of man. Genesis 3:15 shows that Satan would think that he was majestic and triumphant over Jesus on the cross, but he failed. In attacking Jesus, Satan made his own doom certain. In Jesus, we share in the victory over Satan: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." (Romans 16:20)

The heel is the part of the body within a serpent's reach. Jesus in taking on humanity, brought Himself near to Satan's domain so Satan could strike Him. This prophecy also gives the first hint of the virgin birth, declaring that the Messiah, the Deliverer, would be the Seed of the woman, but not of the man.

In closing, I would like to tell you a story:

There was once a girl who was lazy and would not spin (spinning was the term used for using a spinning wheel to make yarn out of flax). Her mother could not persuade her to do it no matter how hard she tried. Finally, the mother became so angry that she gave her daughter a good beating. While the mother was beating the girl, the queen of the realm happened to pass by and heard the girl crying. The queen stopped, entered the house, and asked the mother why she was beating her child.

The woman was ashamed to tell of her daughter's laziness, so she said, "I am trying to stop her from spinning. That's all she wants to do. Day and night, she keeps on spinning, but I am poor and cannot supply her with enough flax."

The queen answered, "I like nothing better than the sound of the spinning wheel, and I always feel happy when I hear its humming. Let me take your daughter with me to the castle. I have plenty of flax, and she shall spin there to her heart's content."

The mother was only too glad to get rid of her daughter, so she agreed to let the queen take the girl with her. When they reached the castle, the queen showed her three rooms completely filled with the finest flax in the land.

"Now you can spin all of this flax," said the queen, "and if you are able to spin it all to my satisfaction, I will make you the wife of my eldest son. You will become the princess. But if you fail, you will be banished from the realm forever."

Even though the girl was momentarily excited about the possibility of becoming the princess, she was inwardly terrified because she knew couldn't spin the flax even if she were to live a hundred years and were to sit spinning every day of her life from morning to evening. She didn't even know how. For three days she sat and cried, without spinning a single thread. On the third day the queen came, and when she saw that nothing had been done, she was surprised and asked for an explanation. The girl excused herself by saying that she had not been able to begin because of the distress she felt from leaving home and her loving mother. The excuse satisfied the queen temporarily, but as she left she said, "Tomorrow you must begin to work."

When the girl was alone again, she couldn't figure out what to do at all. In her frustration, she gazed out the window and saw three women who were passing by. One had a broad flat foot that caused her to walk with a limp, the second had a fat lower lip that hung down under her chin, and the third had a huge thumb that looked ugly and sore. When they saw the girl, they stopped at the window and asked what the girl was doing. The girl told them her plight, and the three women said, "We are spinners, and we will help you on one condition. When you marry the prince, invite us to your wedding, and do not be ashamed of us. Call us your cousins, and let us sit at your table. If you will promise this, we will finish off your flax-spinning in a very short time."

"Oh yes, I promise with all my heart," the girl answered. "Only come in now and begin at once."

The women came in and began spinning the yarn immediately. The first one drew out the thread and pumped the treadle that turned the wheel; the second moistened the thread with her mouth, and the third twisted it with her thumb. Soon heaps of beautiful yarn began falling to the ground. Whenever the queen came by, the girl would hide the three spinsters and keep them out of sight. The queen was amazed at the heaps of well-spun yarn, and there was no end to the praise that the girl received. When the first room was empty, they went on to the second, and then to the third, so that at last all the flax was spun.

Then the three women left, saying to the girl, "Do not forget your promise, and nothing bad will happen to you."

When the girl showed the delighted queen the three empty rooms and the heaps of beautiful yarn, the wedding was arranged at once. The prince was quite pleased that he was to have such a diligent and hardworking wife.

“I have three cousins,” said the girl, “and they have been very kind to me over the years. May I invite them to the wedding, and ask them to sit at the head table with us?”

The queen and the prince both said, “Yes, that would be permitted.”

When the wedding feast began, in came the three spinsters and sat down at the head table. The prince was surprised at their appearance. “Oh,” he said, “I didn’t realize that you had such dreadfully ugly relatives.”

He went up to the first spinster and looking down at her broad, flat foot, asked, “How did your foot become so large?”

“From pumping the treadle on the spinning wheel,” she said. “From pumping.”

He then went up to the second spinster and said, “How is it that you have such a great hanging lip?”

“From licking the thread,” she answered. “From licking.”

Then he asked the third, “How is it that you have such a huge thumb?”

“From twisting the thread,” she replied. “From twisting.”

The prince considered all this for moment and then announced, “From this day forward, my beautiful bride will never again touch a spinning wheel!”

And together they lived happily ever after.

As you were listening to this story, did you keep thinking, Uh oh. Pretty soon she’s going to be found out! She’s going to be in deep trouble.

That’s not the way the story turns out. Even though the girl is lazy, deceptive, and unworthy of being made a princess, she gets away with it. Nothing bad happens to her, and she’s off the hook forever. The story has a wonderfully happy ending.

That’s the story of the Gospel. That’s what grace is all about. Like the girl, you and I are lazy, dishonest, and undeserving of anything except banishment from the realm. But God in his great mercy sent his Son so that we would never ever have to pay the penalty for our sin. Just as the three spinsters carried the burden of spinning for the girl, Jesus bore our sins on the cross and we are set free. God has given us his kingdom. We are adopted into his family forever. It’s like a fairy tale - the only difference is, it’s true!