

The Gospel proclaimed in Eden

2nd September 2007

Ps. 46: 1 - 3

Ps. 112: 1 - 3

Baptism Ps.103: 1, 7

Hymn 47: 3, 7 - 9

Ps. 21: 5 - 7

Ps. 116: 5, 7, 9, 10

Scripture reading: Gen.3: 1 - 24

Text: Gen.3: 15

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Picture for yourself a man standing with his foot on the head of a serpent. The man's heel has been struck by the serpent, but under the man's heel you see the head of the serpent - crushed. See this, and you see the gospel portrayed in a nutshell. This was the promise of hope given to Adam before he had to leave the garden.

From this text, Gen.3:15, I proclaim God's word to you with the theme:

The gospel revealed in a lost Paradise

We will note:

1. That Satan is cursed
2. The victory promised
3. A church preserved

In the first place we will now note that...

Satan is cursed

Are we not reading too much into our text? God is only addressing a snake, isn't He? Even the language He uses clearly indicates that he is speaking to a beast of the field.

The LORD says to the serpent:

“Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”.

Well, if this text speaks about nothing else than the hatred between snakes and man, then we also have to acknowledge that we have no record in Scripture of the gospel proclaimed in Paradise. Then we also have to change answer 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism where we confess that the gospel has been proclaimed in Paradise - with a reference to this verse.

Brothers and sisters, the curse is indeed pronounced on the snake, yet the curse is at the same time also pronounced against the one that stands behind the snake, the actual author of the lie.

God indeed addresses the serpent, but with what purpose would He thunder against the snake if the snake could not understand His words? The curse is pronounced and revealed not for the sake of the serpent's understanding of it, but first for the sake of man, and second that Satan himself may know his punishment.

We will come back to this shortly to see how the curse applies to Satan himself.

But as for the snake, it was only the instrument used by the devil. And so, whenever we see a snake, we are reminded of our enemy, not as if *snakes* are our biggest danger in life, but the one who disguised himself as the serpent.

Since Satan then chose to use this instrument, there in Paradise, the serpent became a symbol of Satan. Thus we read in Scripture that Satan is “that serpent of old”:

“...that serpent of old, called Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world...” - Rev.12:9

And again:

“...that serpent of old, who is Devil and Satan...” - Rev.20:3

Or we may think of John 8:44 where Christ says that the devil is *the father of lies* and that he was *from the beginning a murderer of man*. Christ traces all lies back to the devil, even the first lie in Paradise.

Hearing Scripture’s own interpretation we thus conclude that it was Satan who spoke to Eve by means of the serpent.

It is with this understanding that we approach our text in verse 15. The first and literal meaning is then simply that there will always be hostility between snakes and man. Snakes bite us, and we kill them.

But when God addressed the animal, the curse had regard not so much to the irrational beast as to the spiritual tempter. The punishment that fell upon the serpent was merely a symbol of that punishment that fell on the tempter himself. While the punishment had a literal fulfilment for the serpent, it also affected the devil in a figurative or symbolic sense. Satan became the object of our utmost contempt and abhorrence. Between him and man the enmity has been set. As his name indicates, he is revealed to be Satan, which means Enemy, Adversary.

God did not so pour out His wrath upon the outward instrument, the snake, as to spare the devil.

God pronounces His curse chiefly against Satan, and He does this in the presence of man for two reasons. First, so that man may learn to beware of Satan as our most deadly enemy, and second, that we may contend against him with the necessary confidence of victory.

The first result of this curse on Satan is that from that day the minds of men are set against him. Even those who follow him, know him as their enemy! The result is that he studies all the more to disguise himself craftily, using indirect methods to deceive men, not showing his real face to us. But the enmity has been set.

To show that this would last not only for one generation, but for all generations to come, He adds that this enmity would also be between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the women.

Now, it is also added that in this hostile strife there will be a winner and a loser. The seed of the woman will be stronger. While the serpent will bruise the heel of the woman's seed, the woman's seed will bruise the serpents head.

We note this in the second place

The promise of victory

The victory is promised to the seed of the woman. The word "seed" in the Hebrew text may be taken as a collective noun, and then it can, for example, refer to the whole posterity of the woman, that is the whole human race, as Eve is the mother of all men. The word "seed" in the Hebrew may, however (just as in English) also refer to one single child born of a woman. Whether the seed refers to many or to one, cannot be determined by the grammar of the text alone, and so we have to look at the context. You will also realise the importance to determine this, for the question at stake is whether the text has a direct reference to Christ or not.

Now, the last part of the sentence says that "He" shall bruise the head of the serpent. He - that is muscular and singular. However, when we look at the Hebrew text, then it may be translated either "he" or "it", depending on our understanding of the word seed whether it refers to the whole posterity or to one child only. If the seed refers to all the children of the woman, then we may translate "they shall bruise" the head of the serpent.

The answer to this question, whether we ought to translate "he" or "they", can only be determined by the rest of Scripture. And so we will allow Scripture to

explain itself. But before we compare the rest of Scripture, we first have to note that the meaning of the word “seed” depends in this context on whether the enemy is a snake or Satan. Because, if the enemy is only a snake, then the seed refers to all men, because there is hostility between all men and snakes, and it is also clear that mankind *as a whole* is superior to snakes and holds the victory. But if the enemy is indeed understood to be Satan himself, then the seed who will conquer him is definitely not all men or mankind.

Taking the enemy to be Satan himself, we know that the seed of the woman does not refer to all men, but only to those who indeed has the victory over Satan.

Eve became pregnant and she bore a son, Cain. There you have the literal seed of the woman. Yet Cain was not the seed spoken of in this verse! Cain became a slave of sin and Satan and death. Cain proved not to be the seed of the woman. After that tragic history where the first seed of the woman did not conquer Satan, but murdered his brother, Eve became pregnant again and she bore Seth. *Then* men began to call on the name of the LORD - 4:26. Through *Seth* a godly generation arose. And through Seth up to Noah an unbroken line of godly seed was preserved by God.

The godly seed was indeed also called “sons of God”. We read in chapter 6:1 these words:

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose”.

Here we read about seed that became mixed. But, dear congregation, this is not a strange fable of divine beings or angels having intercourse with woman, as some have foolishly imagined. No, it simply speaks of the intermarriage between believers and unbelievers. This is presented to us as the cause for the terrible state before the flood, and why the godly generation, the godly seed, became almost extinct. The seed of the woman, who are referred to as the “sons of

God”, married the seed of the serpent. But we will come back to this in a moment.

After the flood the seed of the woman were preserved through Noah, but again not through *all* his physical descendants. Ham did not conquer Satan. He became cursed himself. Shem was the blessed of Jahve, from whom Abraham descended. And through divine election the seed was promised to Abraham:

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...” - Gen.22:18.

Now, the apostle Paul comments on this. He says:

“...to Abraham and to his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ” - Gal.3:16.

What is the apostle Paul saying? He gives an explanation of the word seed - that seed which has been promised to Abraham. He says it refers not to many seeds, but to one man, Christ. Christ is the promised seed, he says.

Now, the apostle Paul does not say this as if he doesn't know that the same Hebrew word can be taken both singular and plural. The apostle Paul knows. He, of all men, knows his Hebrew very well. But he is not making a comment on the grammar of the text, no, he is making a comment on the meaning of the text. He interprets this word “seed” for us, and he tells us that we should not take it to refer to many but to one, that is Christ. Christ is the promised seed.

And when we realise that Scripture presents to us only one promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, our question with regard to Gen.3:15 has been answered by the apostle Paul.

When we take all these passages of Scripture together, we find that there is not a variety of gospels in Scripture, but one gospel. We find in all of Scripture only one promise, a promise which is fulfilled only in Christ. There are not many

covenants, but one. There are not many gospels, but one. All the promises in Scripture are one, they all have their fulfilment in Christ.

All the promises of God are in Christ Yes, and in Him Amen - 2 Cor.1:20.

The same seed was also promised to David:

“...I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom...I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” - 2 Sam.7:12, 13.

That seed who was promised to David had been promised long before to Abraham, and the same seed promised to Abraham had been promised long before to Adam. The promise of victory and blessing belongs to one man, Christ.

But brothers and sisters, the victory promised in Gen.3:15 also belong to us, for Christ's victory is ours. In Him we will trample on Satan's head. In Him all our enemies are crushed.

Christ became the second Adam, the head of a new mankind, or rather: a mankind that is renewed in Him. And so this promise of victory belongs to the church and to every member of the church - those who are one with Christ through faith.

We find this application in the apostle Paul's letter to the congregation in Rome:

“...the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you...” - Rom.16:20.

God will crush Satan under *your* feet shortly.

How then shall we understand Gen.3:15? The seed of the woman is not all mankind, but those who are united in Christ as their Head and Saviour. *Christ* has

trampled the serpent under His feet and crushed his head. In Christ the victory is ours.

He came to destroy the devil - Hebr.2:14

The Son of God was manifested for *this* purpose:

“...that He might destroy the works of the devil” - 1 John 3:8.

Christ has already triumphed over the forces and powers of the devil - Col.2:15

Brothers and sisters, we also look forward to the final fulfilment of Gen.3:15, that day when the devil will be cast into hell, where he - and those who belong to him - will be tormented forever and ever - Rev.20:10.

Christ must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor.15:25).

To that end He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God clothed with all power in heaven and on earth. But He does not sit there only as the Son of God, He sits there as the Son of Adam. Yes, the One who has been clothed with all authority and power, the One to whom the victory belongs, is the seed of David, the seed of Abraham, the seed of Adam - that Seed who has been promised in a Paradise once lost.

We will taste the fulfilment in a restored Paradise, new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Then we will share in His victory and reign with Him forever and ever - Rev.22:5.

We see how the promise of Gen.3:15 unfolds in God's history of salvation. Our text, Gen.3:15, has rightly been called the mother of promises. It is the very first summary of the whole gospel.

Man obeyed the word of Satan and became a slave to sin, a slave of the ruler of this world, from which Christ alone could set us free.

“...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...” - Gal.4:4.

Here we may note the reason why this Seed is also called the Seed of the woman, even in Gen.3:15: because He had in fact no earthly father. He would be born of a virgin.

There remains one important aspect of this gospel that we should note carefully. Gen.3:15 does not only speak of enmity between the serpent and the woman, but also between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. As we examine these words and listen to Scripture’s own interpretation of them, we will find that it deals with the church, and the persecution of Christ’s church in this world, also the separation between church and world. We note that in the third place:

A church preserved

What is meant with the seed of the serpent? We must remember that Gen.3:15 has first a literal application to the snake. The seed of the serpent will then literally refer to the procreation of snakes, or if you wish, a brood of vipers! The literal meaning then is that there will always be snakes fighting man and man will always hate and kill snakes. However, as we have seen already, God does not thunder His wrath against the brute animal as much as He actually addresses the deceiver and tempter of Eve.

Satan also has his seed. And who are they?

We read about the seed of Satan in many passages. In a conversation with unbelieving Jews Jesus spoke these words to them:

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the

truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” - John 8:44.

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do”!
In saying this Christ clearly indicates that everyone who does the will of Satan, also has Satan as father.

“He who sins is of the devil...” - 1 John 3:8.

For this reason Christ addresses the children of the devil as “Serpents, brood of vipers!” - Mt.23:33. This imagery speech has its roots here in Gen.3:15: the seed of the serpent, brood of vipers! And this Christ Himself applies to people whom He calls children of the devil, who has the devil as their spiritual father.

And we have to note how he applies this even to covenant children - those covenant children who turn their back on Christ. They are reckoned to be part of this world,

“...and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” - 1 John 5:19.

That is to say: all unbelievers are under the control of the devil, they are enslaved to him.

For this reason Christ calls Satan “the ruler of this world” - John 12:31.

Unbelievers are ruled by him.

Now that we understand who the seed of the serpent are, we turn to the enmity which God has set between these and the seed of the woman.

Eve bore two sons, Cain and Abel. Both could literally be called her seed, yet, spiritually Cain was not her seed, but the seed of the serpent. Cain murdered his brother. Now the apostle John comments on this and he says:

“...Cain...was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you” - 1 John 3:12, 13.

The apostle Paul takes another example from the history of Abraham and his children, and says:

“...as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now” - Gal.4:29.

He refers to Ishmael and Isaac.

He takes that to be true in all ages, that the children born according to the flesh persecutes the children born according to the Spirit.

Or think of the words of our Lord where He says to His disciples:

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” - John 15: 18, 19.

We find the same thing when the apostle Paul writes to Timothy saying:

“...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” - 2 Tim. 3: 12.

The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman is real.

It is not only a reality in this world, but also in the spiritual world:

“...war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world...” - Rev.12: 7 - 9.

The enmity is also not one sided. The adversity is not only from the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman, but there is also such a thing as a holy enmity from the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent.

Think for example of David when he says:

“Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies” - Ps.139: 21, 22.

Or think of the apostle James where he says:

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” - James 4:4.

Heaven and hell can never be reconciled, nor can the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman befriend each other.

God’s covenant people are not allowed to mingle with the heathen. This is not something typical of the Old Testament, no, the same command is repeated in the New Testament:

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?...Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord’...” - 2 Cor.6: 14 - 17.

In putting enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman God has secured a church for Himself. For we know what happened before the flood, when the sons of God married the daughters of men, and chose for themselves wives who could be praised for their outward beauty only. It caused God to wipe them off from the face of the earth.

We know also what happened at mount Peor where the sons of Israel began to commit harlotry with the woman of Moab - Numbers 25.

We know many examples from the history of God’s covenant people how they brought the wrath of God upon themselves by mingling with the heathen.

We see the same in the history of the church in the New Testament. As often as she tried to befriend the world, as often she has stained herself with adultery. If we look at church history, it was also during such times that heavy persecutions followed for those who stayed faithful to the Lord.

The enmity of Gen.3:15 is not a personal hatred for personal reasons, no, it is the separation between church and world. Whoever ignores this enmity, has already become an adulterer.

Brothers and sisters, here in Gen.3:15 the Lord has laid the foundations of His kingdom. Adam would be victorious in Christ, and in Christ Paradise would be restored.

Without Him as our Mediator there would be no salvation history. Yes, for the fallen angels there was indeed no salvation, and for them there is indeed no history of salvation, but for fallen man God provided a Mediator (Hebr.2:16).

As the apostle Peter confirms, *Christ and His sacrifice* was foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1: 19, 20). For that reason the promise of our text could be proclaimed.

Dear congregation, we are made even richer than our fathers Adam and Abraham. To us the fullness of this gospel has now been revealed in the New Testament. We have the privilege to know the immense extend of this victory.

I saw Satan *fall* like lightning from heaven, Christ says to His disciples (Luke 10:18).

And the disciples saw Christ *ascending* into heaven!

The promise belongs to us. We are more than conquerors in Christ.

Amen.