

Series: Shalom

August 28, 2016

## **Title: How Tempting!**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: Genesis 3:1-24**

### **A Snake in the Garden**

**Midnight snack?**

**[Slide 2]**

It's 11:30 p.m. and you're hungry. You can't sleep; you're feeling stressed out. And you happen to know that there is one more piece of cheesecake sitting in the fridge. Only one problem: your doctor gave you specific instructions to lose 15 pounds. The cheesecake is just what the doctor *didn't* order.

So whose fault is it that you break down and eat the cheesecake? What are you going to tell your wife tomorrow morning?

- "The devil made me do it"?
- "The cheesecake made me do it"?
- Or how about: "It's all your fault for making such a tempting cheesecake!"

### **A strange encounter:**

The Creation Story tells us how God made a functional and ordered world out of chaos and disorder. We have seen how God's Creation is a story in progress. It isn't like a finished painting that you hang on the wall to look at. It is more like a story which God began writing and started on its way. He created the characters and the setting. But now the characters themselves are not just part of the story; instead, they are free to decide how the story moves forward.

No sooner have the two humans discovered each other and assumed their role as caretakers and guardians of God's Garden than another unexpected character appears:

**[Slide 3]**

*Genesis 3:1 NIV*

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

So just who or what is this "snake in the garden"?

The standard answer to the question is that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was none other than what the Book of Revelation calls "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." (Revelation 12:9).

But if we look more closely at Genesis 3:1, we discover that the snake was *not* a spiritual being that invaded God's Creation. Instead, the text tells us that the snake was one of God's creatures. What distinguished it from the other wild animals that the LORD God had made was its shrewdness or craftiness.

**A Snake in the Garden:**

We see this shrewdness on display in the question that the snake poses to the woman:

*Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

The question asks for a Yes or No answer. It doesn't overtly take any position. But the question either deliberately or inadvertently gets God's command wrong. It asks if, in effect, the entire goodness of Creation is forbidden to the humans.

Could it be that this story is about a test built into Creation itself? Here we have one aspect of God's Creation testing or tempting the designated rulers of God's new world. The snake doesn't tell the woman to defy God. It presents her with questions about her relationship to both God and His world.

It's something like that piece of cheesecake sitting in the fridge at 11:30 p.m. The cheesecake is *good!* And that's the point. It cries out to be consumed, enjoyed. That's what it was made for. What good is it if it just sits there and spoils?

What good indeed?

## The Test

### What exactly did God say?

The woman's answer reminds us that there is one more part of God's good Creation that plays a role in this story of temptation – a very special Tree:

#### [Slide 4]

*Genesis 3:2 NIV*

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,"*

So far, so good. She has corrected the suggestion that God's good Creation is off limits to human beings who occupy a unique place as not only part of Creation, but also as companions of the Creator.

But then she incorrectly repeats God's command:

#### [Slide 5]

*Genesis 3:3 NIV*

*"...but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*

First of all, she does *not* mention the fact that God gave humans permission to eat from any tree in the garden except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Secondly, she omits any reference to the fact that there were not one, but *two trees in the middle of the garden*. Instead, she focuses solely upon the one that is forbidden to her.

Finally, she adds another prohibition: *"and you must not touch it."*

### Legalism or relationship?

What's going on here? The woman has altered what God said in such a way as to make the command an impersonal law instead of a part of a loving relationship. She is no longer thinking of how she can please her loving Creator. Instead, she has already made for herself an extra law to keep her

out of trouble. A relationship with God has already become mere performance – the essence of dead, dry legalism.

And when we do that sort of thing, the forbidden thing only becomes more enticing. Imagine trying to keep away from that piece of cheesecake by putting it in a plastic container with the words “Do not touch!” written on the outside. Is that going to change the tastiness of the cheesecake? Or does the extra prohibition simply make the temptation all the more exciting?

The real issue is not how many laws the woman can make for herself to keep out of trouble. The real issue is that she is thinking and acting on her own instead of remaining deeply connected to her loving Creator.

### **The Test:**

The serpent speaks one last time:

#### **[Slide 6]**

*Genesis 3:4-5 NIV*

*“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman.*

*“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

The serpent never says, “Go ahead, eat from the forbidden tree.” In fact, what the serpent says is true to a point:

- Nobody dies immediately from eating the fruit.
- Eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil does result in the beginning of knowing God’s world from A to Z *without* relationship or dependence upon Him.

What the serpent leaves out, of course, is that for humans life is more than breathing and eating for a certain number of years. The real definition of Life includes most of all sharing God’s Presence. Real Life means relationship with Him.

#### **[Slide 7]**

*John 17:3 NIV*

*"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

## **How Tempting!**

### **Eating the fruit:**

So there it sits: the last slice of the most delicious cheesecake your wife ever made. It's going to taste sooo good. It's a work of art. And it even offers to help ease your stress and put you to sleep. Why not just go ahead and eat it? Isn't that what it was made for?

When the woman looks at the forbidden fruit, she thinks the same thing:

### **[Slide 8]**

*Genesis 3:6 NIV*

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

So what happens when you snatch that last piece of cheesecake in the middle of the night? Well, first of all your taste buds explode with delight. The fact that the cheesecake was supposed to be out of bounds makes it taste all the better. The beautiful thing is yours – on the way to becoming literally a part of you. And you feel in control. You manage your own destiny. No boundaries!

Isn't that what happened for the man and the woman when they ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Their action gave them an entirely different way of relating to God and His Creation, one in which they could not only make the rules, but break them if they so desired. They were in control. They managed their own destiny. No boundaries!

### **Consequences:**

Okay, so you've eaten the cheesecake. Now what? Well, first of all your wife has noticed that you aren't in bed and asks what you're doing.

“Just using the bathroom. Be right there.” You do go into the bathroom to brush your teeth and swig some mouthwash. No more delicious taste of cheesecake. Just Listerine.

And what about tomorrow morning when she opens the fridge and sees that the cheesecake is missing? What lie are you going to come up with then?

Choosing to be our own little god has consequences. We find out that it’s harder to run the universe than we thought. And that’s what the man and the woman discover in short order.

First, they discover their own nakedness and experience shame. They each have something to hide – the dark reality of their rejection of God’s command. They certainly know more now. Instead of allowing God to grow them and develop character and moral discrimination over time, they have jumped in over their heads, doing things they wish they had never done, unleashing consequences that they could never have imagined.

Their relationship with God will never be the same. He seeks them out and holds them to account. He loves them still, but now banishes them from His Garden. The Creation they thought they could master now becomes a foe. And death becomes their final earthly reality.

### **How Tempting!**

Temptations come to us in many ways. It may be that piece of cheesecake. It may be a bikini at the beach. It may be in a controlling attitude toward others. It may be in setting ourselves up as Judge and Jury for the human race. Like the man and the woman in the Garden, we’ll never outsmart the world around us.

But God has made a way for us to get out of the death spiral of disorder, sin and chaos. Paul writes:

### **[Slide 9]**

*1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV*

*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

If God has given us the power to make decisions about how we relate to Him and His world, then we will always face the temptation of turning away from Him. It's part of the package. For Him to remove all temptation would mean for Him to take away His good Creation. Instead, He offers to lead us to the other Tree, the Tree of Life.

And that is why we pray: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."