

What's gone wrong (and what's God gonna do about it?)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2024

Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, the unfolding of your word gives light. It gives us understanding.

And so, Father, we just pray as we just sung that you will lead us in your truth. Help us to grasp your word and help us to go to the only place where we can find the words of eternal life.

So we pray that we will take that to heart today and your spirit be at work. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now, whenever something goes wrong, we always want to know why.

So if my computer is suddenly afflicted by the dreaded blue screen of death, I want to know why. Is it because I open too many programs at the same time? Is it because I clicked on that link and accidentally downloaded a virus?

Yes, maybe my laptop is just too old and if only my wife had agreed to let me buy a new one, this wouldn't have happened. We want to know why.

[1 : 06] Now, what about the world? What's gone wrong with this world? That's the big question, isn't it? Think about your life. Perhaps all is well at the moment.

It's neat. It's orderly. No chaos. But then something inevitably goes wrong. The car doesn't work. A loved one falls sick.

Perhaps very sick. A friendship unexpectedly breaks down. A new boss arrives and suddenly the work environment becomes worse. This is our life.

This is our human experience. And we want to know why. So what's your explanation for what's gone wrong with this world?

Well, today Genesis 3 is going to give us the Bible's answer. For the past five weeks, we've been looking at God's good design from Genesis 1 and 2. We've seen God design the world we live in as a good, good world.

[2 : 11] As a place of life. It's a place meant for rest and relationships. For fruitfulness and abundance.

As man and woman joyfully serve God together. But it is so clear that we don't live in Genesis 1 and 2 anymore. And Genesis 3 will tell us why.

It's an incredibly important chapter. I don't think it's an overstatement to say that if we get this wrong, we get Christianity wrong.

After all, if you get the diagnosis wrong, you will get the cure wrong. And so Genesis 3 is pivotal because God is giving us an explanation for what has gone wrong with this world.

And even more importantly, what he's going to do about it. So let's work our way through this passage and we'll do so under three C's. Here's the first C.

[3 : 16] The catastrophe. Verse 1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.

So seemingly out of nowhere, a new character is introduced. The serpent appears. Who is he? Where has he come from? The New Testament identifies him with Satan.

But beyond that, we are just not told much. The serpent, verse 1 simply tells us, is one of the wild animals. He belongs to creation.

He has no claim of any sort to be the creator. In fact, he should be not just under God, but under human beings as well. Adam probably named him and his man to rule over him.

But now the serpent is going to reverse God's good design. He's going to upset the creation order. And perhaps that's why it is a serpent in particular.

[4 : 25] In the ancient world, the serpent was a common symbol for chaos. And remember how in Genesis 1, everything started with chaos?

How everything was formless and empty? But God brought everything into form and order? But the serpent now wants to do the opposite.

He wants to reverse that. He's going to throw everything into chaos. But the serpent isn't going to upset things by making a big scene.

He's too crafty for that. Instead, verse 1, he starts by saying to the woman, Did God really say? And this signals to us where the central drama is going to take place.

This battle is going to take place in the realm of words. More specifically, this will be a battle over the word of God.

[5 : 31] You see, God has spoken. Indeed, he has spoken gloriously. As his word in Genesis 1 and 2 brings forth the world and life and relationships.

But now the serpent seeks to undermine God's word. That's his strategy. Why? Well, you see, whenever you question someone's word, you're really questioning their character, aren't you?

Whenever you question someone's word, you're really asking, Can I trust you? And if the serpent can get us questioning God, and his word, he can slowly begin to turn us away from him as we lose trust in him.

And that will mean chaos. And so he asked the woman, God said you can't eat from any tree?

You can't eat anything nice? Ayoh, that's shocking. How, ah? Notice what the serpent is doing. He is introducing a false problem.

[6 : 49] Of course, God said no such thing. Look back at Genesis 2, verse 16 to 17, and we know what God said is that Adam is free to eat from any tree.

Thousands of them, except one. But now the serpent cleverly twists God's command, rearranging a few words so that its meaning becomes muddled.

Unlike the last two weeks where we saw there were real potential problems, no rain, no man, it's not good for the man to be alone, this time the serpent invents a problem where there is none.

And Satan has always loved doing this. We still see it today. You know, when we're debating whether it's right or not to sign up to that dodgy business contract, Satan comes up and says to us, hey, you know, it doesn't technically go against the law of the land, right?

And God's word says, I just need to obey the law. So no issue. Or when we are struggling with whether we can say homosexuality is against God or not, Satan comes along and whispers in our ear, oh, Jesus never even mentioned homosexuality in his teaching.

[8 : 07] So we can't be sure of what Jesus actually thought. Yeah, so it's okay. It's all a matter of interpretation anyway. That is how Satan works.

He suggests that God has said something outrageous, pretending to be surprised by all of this. And so he implies some sort of problem with God's word.

And then he indirectly invites us to sit in judgment of what God says. If God is like that, I guess maybe God isn't quite who we think he is.

Maybe we can't be so trusting of him after all. He gets us so fixated on the false problem so that the good God of Genesis 1 and 2 fades from our memories.

So how does the woman respond? Well, let's read on. Verses 2 and 3. The woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 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.

[9 : 27] Now at first glance, it looks like the woman is simply repeating what God says. So she's correcting the serpent. Except, she doesn't actually.

She goes beyond what God says. Notice the end. You must not touch it. Now that is adding to what God says, isn't it?

God never said that. And you might say, oh, but what's the big deal? It's not as if she is saying the opposite. If anything, she probably did it out of good motives.

It's like when a father says to the kids, hey, don't touch my precious model plane in my bedroom, okay? And the older sibling tells the younger sibling, hey, that's it.

Don't go into his bedroom, okay? By expanding the parameters of the prohibition, you're kind of really, really making sure that there is no way you will break the command.

[10 : 30] You are adding extra protection to help you obey that command. So surely that is okay? You know, if you don't even touch the fruit, you surely won't eat it.

What's wrong with taking a bit of extra precaution? But according to the Bible, that is a dangerous thing to do.

Why? Because you actually end up where Satan wants you to be. If God says, don't get drunk, but you say to someone, hey, God absolutely forbids alcohol under every circumstance, then the person might think, oh, I guess God isn't generous after all.

God is misrepresented, which is exactly what Satan wants. And because God is misrepresented, resentment can build, and actually, desire for sin increases.

others. In fact, the woman is really the forerunner of the Pharisees. Like them, she constructs rules that go beyond or diverges from what God actually says, which end up being burdensome.

[12 : 04] So, though it might seem like a good idea at first to add some extra prohibitions, and it might even be done out of good motives, the Bible is clear it will backfire in the end.

God doesn't need us to assist him ethically. But that is what the woman does. And it means the serpent is free now to make his next move.

This he does in two ways. First off, he now directly challenges God's truthfulness. Verse 4. You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman.

In other words, the serpent is saying, you believe God? You don't know that he's bluffing me? He says he will die if you eat, but of course he only knows how to talk.

You won't die. There's no consequences, no judgment. He's supposed to be a God of love, right? Well, that's how Satan often appeals to us.

[13 : 14] Nothing will happen to you, he says. Forget doing your homework, go play all you like because teacher will never punish you. Do whatever you like from Monday to Saturday because God doesn't really care outside of a Sunday.

But of course, it is a lie. that's not how God designed our world to be. And then second off, the serpent now directly challenges God's goodness.

Verse 5. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be open and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

The serpent has already been insinuating from verse 1 that God is a bit of a wet blanket. But now he forcefully makes that point. Don't you know he says that God is really holding something back from you?

He's never had your best interest at heart. That's what Satan always says to us. God is out to spoil your fun. And then he holds up an alternative in front of us.

[14 : 29] If you eat this fruit, you will be like God. sin always works that way. It always promises.

Do this and you'll be more successful. Look there, you'll feel more pleasure. Follow my path and you can be like God.

Now if we think carefully, the promises are actually empty. we are already like God. We're made in his image. We're already on top of the world.

We're made to rule creation. We already live in God's good world. There is plenty of pleasure to be had. Sin's promises are always nothing more than cheap counterfeits.

things. things. And that is exactly why what happens next is a catastrophe.

[15 : 36] Humans are faced with a choice. they have the word of God and they have the words of the serpent. But who should they listen to?

It should be God's life-giving word, not the serpent's empty ones. But, verse 6, 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. And this, my friends, is the catastrophe.

This, my friends, is the reason why everything has gone wrong with our world. The woman listened to a creature instead of the creator and followed her impressions instead of her God-given instructions.

She accepted the false solution to the false problem the serpent had laid before her. And by the way, just in case you think it's all the woman's fault, that cannot be.

[16 : 58] Remember how two weeks ago we said that Adam is meant to act in a priestly role? he's meant to guard Eden from uncleanness and impurity.

So he should have ejected the serpent as fast as possible. But instead, he seems to have been quiet all this while. He has abdicated his responsibility.

instead of preventing the woman from listening to the serpent, he eats the fruit too. And chaos breaks out.

you see, what lies at the heart of this catastrophe? It isn't just that they broke a rule.

This isn't just like us parking for one hour too long at the designated parking space and so having to pay a fine. No, it is because they thought they could be like God, knowing good and evil.

[18 : 03] that is what they were promised. This doesn't mean they can now know the difference between good and evil where they didn't know before, since the woman clearly already knows the difference back in verse 2.

No, it means that they thought they can decide for themselves what is good and what is evil. They can act independently of God and be their own God.

Now, this is really the essence of sin. Regardless of the specific sin, sin at its heart is us declaring to God, you're not God.

You can't be God. God. I have to be God, at least the God of my own life. It is personal, not just legal.

Whenever we tell a lie, we are really saying to God, I get to decide which version of truth works and it's my truth.

[19 : 21] Or whenever we covet stuff, we're really saying to God, God, you're not God the provider, I know that I need more, contrary to what you may think. I wonder if you think of sin that way.

Maybe not, but that is how you should think because that is what sin really is. It's declaring to God, you're not God, you can't be God, God, I am.

Now all this is a complete lie, of course. God will never stop being the good God, the sovereign God, the only God. And we will never replace God.

And that's why verse 6 is so catastrophic. God's truth has been exchanged for a lie. And as we'll see in a moment, it leads to terrible consequences.

So let's grieve over sin's entrance into the world. That should be how we respond to verse 6. And let us be mindful of how sin often works.

[20 : 35] That's what Genesis 3, verse 1 to 6 shows us too. It starts with deception as we become persuaded that God is a bad guy, that his commands are more restrictive than they really are.

And it continues as we now persuade ourselves that it's fine to do things that we know that we shouldn't, or that our motives are pure when they are really not.

And then it leads to disbelief. We sin because we don't believe God when he tells us there will be consequences. We sin because we don't believe God knows what is best for us.

Ignatius of Loyola once said, Sin is the unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness.

And out of that self-deception and disbelief comes disobedience. We think we know best, so we act accordingly.

[21 : 49] But here is the paradox. In our attempts at self-promotion, we end up with self-destruction. And that now brings us to our second C, the consequences.

If you mess with the design of an aeroplane, it can have tragic consequences. It will crash. And similarly, if you mess with God's good design of this world, there will be consequences as well.

That's what the rest of Genesis 3 covers. First off, there is shame, verse 7. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed thick leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Now, back in 2, verse 25, the couple could even be naked without shame. That's how comfortable and in tune with one another they are. But now they need to cover things up.

You see, once we start to live life according to our own desires, we are no longer living according to God's good design. And that means there will be things in our lives, some fault, some imperfection, some wrongdoing, we don't want others to know about.

[23 : 15] So we block each other's gaze, we cover up, we hide what we think is shameful. So that intimate, face-to-face, one-flesh relationship that the couple was supposed to enjoy, it's been disrupted.

That's one of the consequences, one we still live with today. We might not literally make fake leaves, but don't we often find ourselves presenting different versions of ourselves to different people?

Don't we go to great lengths to make sure the careless words we said in private conversation or the history of our web browsers don't become public?

And don't we wish that the ground will open and swallow us up if someone did indeed find out that we are doing something that is opposite to who we say we are?

We dread being found out. That is how we live today. And that is why verse 8, when God approaches the humans hide.

[24 : 33] Where there is shame there is fear. And in this case it is appropriate. The very fact that Adam and Eve feel shame and need to hide, it's not based on some feeling of low self esteem that they shouldn't have.

It's because they know they are truly guilty before God. They have no excuse. sinning. And that's exactly what we do too, don't we?

When we know we are sinning suddenly it feels wrong to go to church and be with God's people. We try to distance ourselves from God. We do what Jonah does and run in the opposite direction.

But of course we are being foolish. As the psalmist says in Psalm 139, where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. In fact, we can't even hide our thoughts from God.

[25 : 39] But our default reaction is the same as the man and the woman. We feel shame. We try to hide and it's so sad, isn't it, that we have to hide from the one whom we were made to rest in relationship with?

But of course God always finds us, so here comes another consequence. Blame. Second off, there is blame.

In verse 12, having been found and questioned by God, the man shifts tactics. It's the woman's fault, he says. She was the one who got me into this.

again, what a far cry now from that united bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh relationship of Genesis 2, isn't it?

It's every man and woman for themselves now. And so the man says, it wasn't really me, it wasn't my fault. Ah, and by the way, God, who was it who made such a woman?

[26 : 49] It was you, God. You gave her to me. And the woman, upon questioning, does the same thing. Verse 13, it was the serpent's fault.

Again, all this blaming is still with us today, isn't it? It wasn't my fault, I was just having a bad day. It wasn't my fault, I had good motives.

It wasn't my fault, don't you know the pressure I have been under, and God, why didn't you take away the pressure in the first place? Fault finding and blame shifting is such a normal part of our human experience today, we don't even notice it.

And it is so sad, isn't it? Sin promised so much, but look at what we are left with, shame and blame.

pain. And then third of all, there is pain. That's what we basically have from verses 14 to 19. God has to pronounce judgment.

[28 : 02] Now notice the order in which he does. He speaks first to the snake, then to the woman, and then to the man. And there is a sense in which God is showing what the correct order of creation is.

Men and women are meant to rule over creation, including the snake, with man being the one with the main responsibility, with the woman being his helper. But this order was disrupted when the snake became the one calling the shots, and the man did not take the lead to guard the woman and the garden from the snake.

So God makes sure now to address things in their correct order, starting with the animal down there to put him in his proper place. Now for today, we'll just skip the curse that is placed on the animal, which is noted in passing, and we'll just jump straight to the consequences for the humans, verse 16.

The woman is meant to partner together with the man to be fruitful and multiply, but now it is pain in childbearing that will be multiplied. That is the consequence of sin.

Something that should bring pure joy will also now bring real agony. And it is not just physical agony, but relational agony. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.

- [29 : 38] What is meant to be a place of unity has now become a place of war. That word desire comes up again in Genesis 4, verse 7, and from there we discover that the basic meaning is simply a desire for mastery.

The wife also wants to be the boss. So no surprise, fights break out, doesn't it? After all, whenever two people decide they now want to play God and put themselves at the center, suddenly there's competition isn't there.

Only one can win. And competition breeds conflict and conflict breeds pain. And then for the man, verse 17, there is going to be pain in his labor.

The land won't be fruitful any longer, but verse 18, it will produce thorns and thistles for you. In other words, work will now be filled with all sorts of difficulties.

There will be floods, there will be pests, there will be tedious meetings, there will be jammed photocopiers, there will be projectors that never work.

- [30 : 57] This is the consequence of human's catastrophic decision not to listen to God's life-giving word. what was once the place of life, the theatre of God's glory, is now the place of destruction to showcase the seriousness of sin.

there is pain. And nowhere is that more obvious than in the next consequence.

For of all, there is death. For thus you are, and to thus you will return. Verse 19.

Why? Because the man and the woman can no longer access the tree of life. They are banished from Eden. God made man and placed him in the garden and made woman from within the garden.

but now they both have to leave. The job Adam formerly had to guard the garden is now given to the angel. And ironically, Adam himself is the unclean being, being barred from coming back into the garden temple where God dwells.

- [32 : 17] God And that is why your life and my life is the way it is. That's why you can have tensions with even other church members, why your body fails you when you least expect it, why you find it so hard to be patient and so easy to point fingers at others, and why we all suffer bereavement in the end.

We fail to trust God and we listen to lies, not the truth. And in fact, that is one big implication of Genesis 3, isn't it?

It is that life is thorny now. Genesis 3 helps us set our expectations for what our world is like. Even after we have become Christians, we still live in a Genesis 3 world.

We are not back in Eden not yet. So it shouldn't surprise us if suffering comes our way, even if we haven't personally done anything wrong. It shouldn't surprise us that even the early church suffered through conflicts and disagreements between brothers and sisters.

It shouldn't surprise us if our hard work isn't always rewarded in this life. Life is thorny now. It is not that there is no joy or no fruit.

- [33 : 44] good. But we must expect the good to be mixed in with the bad while we still live in this world. Any version of Christianity that says otherwise is a misleading one.

And another implication of Genesis 3 is that sin never brings anything good. I think Moses really wants to press his heart on us, isn't it?

By the way, he brings out all that detail in verses 7 to 24. You know, the serpent said, be like God. Sounds like such a great promise, doesn't it?

But look at all the havoc sin has brought about. And so every time we think that sin can't be that bad, that it's just a little thing. It's not a big deal.

Genesis 3 should make us think twice. really? Not that bad? When it brings shame and blame and pain and death?

[34 : 48] When it puts us at odds with our good God and with his good will? When it means we live according to a lie rather than the truth? No. Sin has real bad consequences.

So don't fall for sin's smooth talk. But what then? What's God going to do about this? Will he just pronounce judgment and walk away?

He could. But Genesis 3 shows us he doesn't. And that brings us to our final C for today, the consolation. Look back at verse 9.

What a remarkable verse that is. In verses 6 to 8, the man and the woman have sinned. They're ashamed. They're hiding. And what does God do?

He comes looking for them. Where are you? And it's not as if God doesn't know where they are. But he's showing that he still cares.

[35 : 52] He still wants relationship with them. He knows what they've been up to, but he goes looking for them. He's the one, as Luke will later describe Jesus, who will come to seek and save the lost.

This is who God really is, even today. He comes looking for sinners like you and I. Because God isn't done yet. Look at verse 15.

God says, I will never let evil win. God will be with the serpent's offspring.

And one day, one of the woman's offspring will crush the serpent's head. In other words, one day, humanity will be on the winning side.

How exactly? Well, Genesis 3 doesn't tell us. It's for us to find out by reading the rest of the Bible. But perhaps I can give a bit of a spoiler by getting us to look at verse 21.

[37 : 00] It's just a little detail, almost a true away one. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And with that, Moses is telling us, look, the serpent was always wrong.

God has always will be gracious. He knows that he's going to send Adam and Eve into the harsh wilderness, and so he dresses them in something that will provide better protection than the pathetic fake leaves they are wearing.

That's our God. But more than that, he is hinting at something he keeps promising throughout the rest of the Old Testament. It is the promise that he will clothe us with something that will reverse the catastrophe of chapter 3.

For instance, listen to what the servant figure gets excited about in Isaiah 61 verse 10 on the screen. I delight greatly in the Lord. My soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.

As a bridegroom adorns his hair like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. So God intends not to let Genesis 3 be the last word.

[38 : 23] And even back in Genesis 3, God is demonstrating how that will be possible. By covering them with animal skins, he is hinting that sacrifice is going to be required.

Fast forward in the Bible and that's exactly what happened. Jesus comes into our world and as a naked baby and goes on to the cross as a naked man, strip off his clothes, and there he takes our sin and our shame, and he does it all so that we will be all covered in his glory, in a robe of his righteousness.

And in doing so, he defeats Satan. He is struck, as verse 15 puts it, so that the chaos that has been introduced into our world will be defeated forever.

That is the consolation that is embedded even amidst the catastrophe of Genesis 3. Even in the earliest chapters of the Bible, God is already preaching the gospel to us.

Perhaps that is why Adam in verse 20 dares to name the woman Eve, which means life giver. Even though they are now surrounded by death, perhaps Adam is expressing there is still hope yet for the human race.

[39 : 49] They can still live. And so my brothers and sisters in Christ rest knowing that God always had a rescue plan from the very beginning.

But as we finish, let me just briefly draw out two more implications. Here is one. Because sin is democratic, we can be humble and compassionate.

Because sin is democratic, we can be humble and compassionate. Now here is what I mean. When we understand that Genesis 3 is the story of every human being, without exception, that will erase all hints of moral superiority, wouldn't it?

we know that we are all in the same boat. We might sin in different ways, some of us might sin in less visible ways than others, but in the end, we have all disobeyed God.

We are all affected by the same disease, and that should promote humility in us. For we know that we are never as good as we think we are, or other people think we are.

[41 : 02] And no matter how outwardly competent, anyone might look, all of us are dealing with some shame and some pain in some way, even if no one else is aware.

And if so, should that not compel us to be more compassionate and patient with one another? That is what a biblical doctrine of sin does.

God's solution is the same for all, no one is beyond hope. You see, Genesis 3 doesn't just teach us we are all sinners, but we are all helpless.

We can't do anything about our state. It is simply not the case that some people can deal with sin better than others and they just need some advice from God while others of us need more than that.

No, we all need the serpent crusher. We all need to be clothed in salvation and every single one of us needs to turn to Jesus for that to happen, no matter who we are.

[42 : 12] But at the same time, here is the good news. No one is too sinful for Jesus to save. All are helpless, but no one is beyond hope. If you put your trust in Jesus for your salvation, whoever you are, you can be on the winning side.

You can be in the new creation, you can enjoy all the blessings of Eden again. And perhaps today there are a few of you who have never embraced Jesus personally for yourselves.

But you have heard God's word today and so you have a choice. You can either ignore him or you can trust him, trust Jesus. so won't you do that today.

In a moment, I will pray and if that is you, I ask you to pray along with me. So let's take a short moment of silence and then we will do that.

if you want to put your trust in Jesus today or if you want to renew your trust in Jesus today, please feel free to repeat in your hearts after me.

[43 : 48] Heavenly Father, I come before you today acknowledging I am a sinner. I confess that too often I want to run my life my own way.

I don't want you to be king of my life. But today I acknowledge that is foolishness. I don't want to live like this anymore. So I ask you to help me to turn from my sin, put my trust in Jesus.

Pray from now on I will let you be God of my life. I take off my old self and ask that you help me be clothed with my new self.

Thank you so much God and I pray all this in Jesus name. Amen.