

Where it All Went Wrong'

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[0 : 00] Now, last Sunday, we saw, didn't we, a wonderful vision of life in Genesis chapter 2, how God created life in this world to be. He made human beings to thrive in a world of beauty, lacking no good thing, and supremely to live with God in his presence, under his word, together for his glory. But I don't need to ask for a show of hands to know how many of us did not have that kind of week this week. Who didn't struggle with sickness, our bodies wearing out, not working as they should, or who didn't struggle with sadness, the loss or pain in our own lives and the lives of those we love? Who did not struggle with solitude, loneliness, a sense of distance or alienation from others? To put it really simply, who has not suffered in any way, even this past week? Or indeed, who has not struggled with sin, the ever-present temptation and reality in our lives, pushing God out of the picture, his word and his ways.

Our daily lives, and indeed our whole world, fall so very far short, do they not, of the glorious vision of life we glimpsed in Genesis chapter 2. From global wars, we see in the news, thousands dead in Ukraine, cities raised to the ground, to countless personal, everyday, heartbreaks and struggles that we will never read about in the news. And holding Genesis 2 in the one hand and our world in the other, our hearts cry out, don't they, where did it go so wrong? Where did that wonderful world go which God created? Why is life not overwhelmingly good as God made it in the beginning to be? There's lots of intellectual pushback, isn't there, against this idea of the creation and the creator that we meet in the book of Genesis, but I wonder whether at heart the disbelief we see in the book of Genesis is actually because in the face of our lived experience. This vision of God's creation seems simply too good to be true.

But in this next chapter of Genesis, we find there is an answer as to why the world is as it is and not as it was in the beginning. This is how we lost that very good world, says this book. Genesis wants us to see firstly at the heart of what has gone wrong is the travesty of sin, the travesty of human sin. Now the scene that we left at the end of chapter 2 could only really be described as bliss. A man and a woman in the world, the world at their fingertips, they want for nothing in the loving presence of their creator, and they do not know shame. But now onto the world stage, we find slithers, the most crafty of all creatures, to twist their hearts away from their creator. Have a read with me from verse 1 if you would. Now the snake 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? Now straight away, there are reasons to think that nothing is right about this interaction.

[3 : 48] Firstly, the question is asked by a talking snake, and that is deeply suspicious. Remember that for the first heroes of Genesis, they also had a book called Leviticus, which told them which animals were clean and unclean. And we find in that book that snakes, the way they slither along the ground, makes them the most unclean of all the creatures, the furthest on the spectrum away from God. And so as one writer puts it for the Israelites, a creature more likely than a serpent to lead man away from his creator, could not be imagined. The snake is a classic villain, so to speak. And on top of that, we're told this snake is crafty, cunning. It's a hint that we should handle his words with caution. He's not saying what he seems to be saying.

And so the very presence of this crafty snake should set us on edge. And indeed, by the end of the story, we know why. Revelation chapter 12 tells us this is none other than that ancient serpent, the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. But even without knowing who he is, his questions give him away, don't they, as a deceiver, a liar. Because what are the very first words out of the serpent's mouth?

Did God really say? Casting doubt on what God has said. And how crafty is this? He deliberately gets it wrong. Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden? Now, had God said

that?

If you glance back to chapter 2, verse 16, what had God actually said? The Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden.

The very opposite of what the serpent suggests. And friends, this is why, incidentally, we spend so much time in our services simply seeing what the Bible says. Because the oldest trick in the devil's book is convincing us that God has said something different. That's why I ask you to look in your Bibles to see for yourself what God has said that's so important. Because what God says is how we know who God is. God had said, except for one tree, every tree is good for food, pleasing to the eye, for you to eat. And those very words impress upon us, don't they? This God is so good, so lavishly generous. His kindness is total. His commitment uncompromising. His love cannot be questioned. And so by taking those words and twisting them, the serpent is casting doubt upon [6:47] God's character. Perhaps he's suggesting God is not so good, not so kind, not so loving as he has led you to think. I've seen it's such an obvious lie. But see how easy it is, brothers and sisters, for the poison to get into our bloodstream. How does the woman answer him in verse 2?

The woman said to the snake, 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. Okay, spot the difference. What's changed? God had said, hadn't he, any and every tree is yours? The woman simply says, the trees. God had said, don't eat from that one tree. The woman says, we can't even touch that tree. See, subtly but surely, she has both added to and taken away from what God had said. And like that, the serpent has brought down the woman's view of God himself. Her words paint a picture, don't they, of a God less generous, more threatening, colder, sterner, harsher than the one she truly knows. Because if we have followed Genesis up to this point, we can see that she has got it so wrong. This is not who God is. God has not held back any good thing from them. He has lavished his kindness and generosity on them. And he has not changed. But already in the woman's heart, she is already thinking less of God than he truly is. God who breathed life into her, suddenly feels so distant from her. Notice in verse 1, what is God called? The Lord God. That word in capitals,

Lord, it translates God's personal name that he revealed, especially to his people, Yahweh. But what was the very first thing the serpent drops? It is God's name. And what does the woman then call him? Not by his name. Not Yahweh, my God, but simply God. It's as if she and God used to be on first name terms, but no longer. Because in her heart now, God seems less the loving and intimate creator of Genesis. More like the disinterested and distant gods of the ancient world. And once her view of God was compromised, well, the rest was easy. You will certainly not die, the snake 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 from evil. Now he goes for the straight attack, doesn't he? It's a straight up character assassination. God has lied to you, he says, by telling you bad things will come from eating the fruits. No, he's holding back something really good for you. He doesn't want you to have it, lest you become like him. It's a total parody of who God is, but here is the travesty. The woman believed it. She believed it. We're right to ask, aren't we? How could she? Surrounded by God's goodness and every breath she took and every fruit that she ate and every moment of her existence. It is a travesty that she would believe even for a second that God did not want the very best for her, that he was not for her in every way, that he would deceive her from keeping her, from thriving in his world. You see that day, the serpent drove a wedge in the human heart between who God is in all his perfection and goodness and majesty and who we instinctively imagine him to be, like a worse version of ourselves. And it is out of that gap in the human heart that all our sin flows as it flowed from the beginning. For now, when the woman looks at the world, she sees the possibility of a world without God and she wants it and she reaches out to take it, verse 6.

[11:20] The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and 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. Now up to now, it would be easy to forget, wouldn't it, that the man was there at all because he has remained silent. Yet, yet there he is by her side the whole time with his wife.

Now remember, who was it? Who was it? He was charged to guard the garden. Who did God command not to eat from the fruit of the tree? Who was it moments ago who sang at last over his wife when he first laid eyes on her? It was the man. And now he stands by and watches a slimy serpent enter the garden, waits as he questions God's words, and does not step in as his wife is

deceived into sin.

God's good world has come undone on his watch. See, the good and wise order that God had created of the man with the help of the woman ruling over the creatures, it's been turned on its head.

The creature now rules over the woman who did not help the man, who did not love and serve his wife. So who is to blame? Well, certainly the serpent, certainly the woman, and certainly the man. Why? Because I hope that we have seen in these verses, not simply because they ate a piece of fruit, but because they have twisted God's words and distrusted his character, and they have ultimately believed that they would be better off without him. Friends, that is what at heart sin is, and it is an utter travesty. There has never been a bigger lie told in the history of this world than that this God of complete goodness could not be trusted. And yet that lie is now ingrained in our world and resident in our hearts. How often, even if we love God, have we questioned whether God really knows what is best for us? Or felt sometimes as if he must be holding something back from us that would be really good, or told ourselves, he cannot possibly be for me.

[13:56] He cannot love me. Perhaps tonight you wouldn't call yourself religious or spiritual, but even the idea of God sometimes seems to you restrictive and oppressive. Friends, Genesis tells us nothing could be further from the truth. But ever since that lie first took root in the human heart, our hearts have been wired not to trust God. Instead, we instinctively do what the man and the woman did in the garden. We imagine that God is cold and distant and harsh and hard. We insist he doesn't know what's best for us. And so we try to invent a world and a life without him in it. And that heart condition we call original sin is the source of every sin, just as it was then. So it is now in me and in ye, an utter travesty that gets who God is and his words and his ways totally wrong.

But Genesis wants us to see that that is why us and our world are not as we were designed to be. You remember these early chapters of Genesis are here to give us a world view, a right way of looking at reality. And chapter 3 teaches us that if sin is not part of the way that we see ourselves and our world, then neither we nor our world will ever make sense to us. Sin is right at the heart of reality as it stands. So what is the fallout from all this? What are we in our world like after that original sin?

Well, secondly, we see the tragedy of human sin. The tragedy of human sin. Now, in the rest of this chapter, we can only kind of touch on what we see, because in fact, we find that the first human sin actually broke everything about who we are and the way our world works. And we cannot work through that list exhaustively. But Genesis calls a few things to our attention. And firstly, it's something we don't often consider. That the first sin broke our relationship with our own bodies. See that there in verse 7? What happened straight away? The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. So the man and the woman, they had been naked and without shame, but suddenly they become self-conscious, aware of their bodies, and feel for the first time shameful. It's a truly bubble-bursting moment, isn't it, for them? They saw in the fruit the chance to become truly wise, knowing good and evil, being like God. But what really happened? Well, they felt less than they were before. Less secure, less whole, less human. The bitter irony, of course, is that they were like God, created in his image, after his likeness. But by reaching out to grasp, to become more than that, determining good and evil for themselves, they found themselves plunged into a pit of painful and shameful self-consciousness. And we can see that, can't we, in our world, and if we're honest, in ourselves. An obsession with image, comparing ourselves with others, suffering from our own self-consciousness. Whole industries are built on the back of our anxiety over our image, aren't they? Beauty, and fitness, and sex, and social media. These industries exist to sell us the chance to feel better about our image, about our bodies, and we buy into it. Why? Because through sin, we have lost the freedom to be naked, vulnerable, known, and without shame. We forget that we only feel the need to work on our own image, because the image of God is no longer enough to satisfy our hearts. Like Velcro.

These industries stick to us because they find hooks buried deep in our own hearts, and they feed on, and they feed into the very shame, and anxiety, and self-consciousness that are in our hearts as a result of that first sin. And that shame in us feeds, doesn't it, into the breakdown in our relationships with one another. That's the knock-on effect. The first couple who had such intimacy now feel the need to hide from one another, both fearing what the other might see. And every human relationship after this has been a negotiation on that basis. How far can I let this person in

before it is too much?

How vulnerable can I be before it gets dangerous? Or how can I control how people see me? This pain, and shame, and difficulty in being known, they are products of sin in our relationship that separate us from one another. But the biggest relationship, of course, the first sin broke, was our relationship with God. See that in verse 8? The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. We thought, didn't we, last week about how the garden was God's special dwelling place, the place where he lived, and the freedom that the man and the woman had in his presence to live with him. And so it's implied as usual, God went for his stroll in the garden in the nice part of the day, but now the man and woman hear God coming, and they run, and they hide from him behind the trees.

[20 : 15] You can see the tragedy. Is this what they imagined themselves doing when they reached out and took the fruit and ate it? Is this the freedom and wisdom and status that they believed sin would give them, hiding behind trees from their creator, God? And there's a lesson in there for us, isn't there, that sin has never, it has never delivered on what it has promised, even from the beginning.

So we shouldn't be surprised, should we, brothers and sisters, when we give into temptation, thinking that this time it will be life-giving and it will do us good, only to find yet again that it never does and it never, ever will. Their sin only served to separate them from God as it does to us. And as they sinned, they lost the freedom that they were created for and gained fear of God instead. See that in verse 9, the man answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid. And so we see in our own hearts, don't we, that instinct to take cover from God. Brothers and sisters, we know, don't we, when we yield to temptation, when we sin, when we do what we know God has said not to do, when we don't do what he has said to do, out of our sense of shame, we resist coming to him and coming clean and laying our hearts bare before our creator, do we not? Confessing our sin. You feel lots of people who aren't Christians, who don't come to God, you find that it's not really because they don't believe in God, it's because they are afraid of what God will think of them and hide from him and are convinced he cannot be trusted.

[22 : 06] And perhaps that is where you are tonight. But if we still needed proof that God is good and kind and loving and trustworthy, look what he says in verse 9.

What did the Lord God say to the man when he came into the garden? Not, get away from me. Or, I'm coming to get ye, but where are ye?

Where are ye? Not because he didn't know, but because he wanted to call his image bearer out of hiding. God went looking for his disobedient creatures, their sin still fresh, but God's love for them was unchanged.

He came to find them. He is not changed, but look how far they have fallen. So it begins the blame game, verse 9.

The man said, the woman you put here with me. It's an element of accusation there, isn't it? God, you gave me this woman? She gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. The woman said, the snake deceived me and I ate.

[23 : 15] But as much as they try to shift the blame, they cannot fool God. And so he curses the serpent, verse 14. You will eat the dust.

Means the same in Hebrew as it does in English. You will eat the dust. And then he passes a sentence on the woman, verse 16. And then on the man, verse 17.

And for both of them, from now on, you find that doing what they were created to do, carrying out God's mission, would be, well, what is it?

Notice the word that's repeated in both those verses, 16 and 17. What will it become? Painful. Painful. Filling the world will become painful for women.

I don't need to tell some of you that. Working the ground became painful for men. I don't need to tell you that either.

[24 : 15] But has it ever crossed your mind to wonder why the two things that should be the most natural things in all the world are so painful? Because they are the things that we lost in the tragic fallout of human sin.

And the final tragedy, of course, is there in verse 19. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground. For since from it you were taken, for dust you are, and to dust

you will return.

The greatest tragedy of all, of course, is that we die. We die. Perhaps you're wondering, in fact, why is God still speaking to the man and the woman?

Since he told them on the day they ate the fruit, they would certainly die. That was the sentence, wasn't it? So was the serpent right in suggesting that God's threats were empty?

Well, no, I think the sense that we're meant to get is that they did die that day. Okay, one day they would return to the dust. But the best illustration of this I've heard is of flowers in a vase.

[25 : 29] You get them in the shop, and you put them in the vase. Over a few days, they bloom and open. For a few days, they look beautiful, they smell nice. And after a few days, they begin to wither.

But when did they die? Well, they were dead when you bought them. They died the moment they were cut. It just took a week or two to show.

Friends, that is me. That is you. As a result of sin. The man and the woman did die that day.

They lost what they needed to truly live. By turning away from God's presence and word and glory. On that day, they were cut off from the giver of life. And even though for Adam, it would take 930 years to show.

In truth, he had been dead from the day he sinned against his creator. So, brothers and sisters, sobering stuff. But who could say it isn't true?

[26 : 34] As you heard Genesis tell you, tell us what life in this world is like as a result of human sin. Did it not strike you how very real it all is?

Friends, we need to recognize that what Genesis is telling us about is not a parallel universe. It is not a fiction. It is describing this world, our lives.

It is so very real. But why depress you by telling you how tragic it all is? Well, because if this presentation of the symptoms is so accurate, then so is the diagnosis.

Genesis gets our world, doesn't it? And then it tells us why it is like that. Genesis wants us to see what is wrong with us and our world and to trace it all back to that first human sin.

And see that that is the root of every tragedy. Every tragedy ever recorded or seen. Or felt in the history of our world.

[27 : 39] Past, present and future. Sin is the problem. It's the sin problem that we need an answer for. But as we close, we see that gladly God does give an answer to the problem of human sin.

As finally we see the majesty of God's grace. I wonder if you noticed as God cursed the serpent, He made a promise to us.

Verse 15. What does He say? God says to the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike His heel.

God is saying this unholy alliance between the serpent and human beings will not stand. The woman and the snake would not forever be on the same side.

He would put a war between them. They would be mortal enemies. Because God would not let humanity go. He would not let go of the woman or her offspring.

[28 : 41] He would create war. And how would that war end? Well, the woman's child would crush the serpent's head. Though the serpent would strike his heel.

In short, the serpent and his lie and the sin that came from it and the curse that issued from our sin and the death that resulted, it would not win. It could not stand.

A child would be born. He would crush the curse of sin at its source by crushing the head of the serpents. See, this is the first promise in our Bibles of a Redeemer.

And we know who that Redeemer is, don't we? None other than God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is Hebrews chapter 2 speaking about the Lord Jesus.

Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity, so that by His death He might break the power of Him who holds the power of death.

[29 : 40] That is the devil. And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by fear of death. He came. He came and did it. He crushed the devil's head.

He broke the curse for our sin. He turned away God's wrath, the curse. He took away our death. How? Hebrews tells us by dying for us.

Becoming a curse for us. Through His death on the cross, Christ redeemed us from Adam's sin. And that whole rescue is foreshadowed in seed in the book of Genesis.

Notice what happens there in verse 21. A sign of this promised Redeemer. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. What needed to happen for them to be covered?

Well, something had to die, didn't it? For them to be covered with skins. Behind this covering, we are meant to see a sacrifice which covered their sin before God.

[30 : 50] Just as the Israelites needed in the desert a sacrifice to cover their sins as they entered the holy place from the east, past the cherubim stitched into the curtains separating them from God.

Also, we need a sacrifice to cover our sins to come into the presence of God. But here is the majesty of God's grace. How long did it take Him after human beings had turned away from Him to offer that very sacrifice?

No time at all. No time at all. The promise that Christ would come to crush the serpent's head and in so doing would die so that our sins might be covered.

So that we might come back into the presence of the living God and never be cast out. This is indeed the God of infinite goodness and kindness and love and grace.

Who we have met in this book. Who we have sinned against. And yet who has not stopped seeking and saving us sinners. Since our very first sin.

[32 : 08] And tonight He calls us simply to see who we are and to see who He is. And to see Christ standing between us.

The promised Redeemer of His people. And to love Him. And trust Him. And believe in Him. To bring us back to God. Our Creator.

And our Redeemer. Let's come to Him in prayer together now. Let's pray. God our Father.

We marvel. At Your grace. But in the face of our sin. You do not recoil. You do not push us away.

But You seek us out.

You call. Where are You? We praise You. Our Father. For the Lord Jesus. You came to seek and save the lost. Our Father.

[33 : 11] We confess. That we do not deserve Your love. Lord. From the very beginning. We deserve only Your wrath. And so we praise You. That in Your Bible.

And in Your Son. We meet Your grace. And Your love. We see that You are indeed good. And trustworthy. And Father. We pray then. That You. By Your Spirit.

Would give us hearts. To trust You again. Father. We have read. And understood. How difficult.

And impossible it is. For our natural human heart. To trust You.

But Father. Your Spirit. Gives life. And gives new birth. And a new heart. And so we pray. Lord.

That such a heart. You would give us. Lord. For any who do not as yet.

Know You. And trust You. That You would give. That new heart tonight. That they would come. To look on Christ. And believe in Him. And Father. That for those of us.

[34 : 06] Who do know You. That You would keep. Our confidence. In Christ. Father. In the face of our sin. In the face of this world. Lord.

That is so fallen. We pray. That You would keep us. Trusting firmly. In the Lord Jesus. We pray to You. That He came to redeem us. And indeed. That one day. He will come to redeem.

The whole world. And so we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.