

Genesis 3 - What's wrong with the world

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[0 : 00] The reading today is from Genesis chapter 3 and it's found on page 5 of the church bibles.!

The woman said to the serpent, When she 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. Then 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. Then 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. But the Lord God called to the man, Where are you? He answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked.

[1 : 46] So I hid. So I hid. And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? The man said, The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done? The woman said, The servant deceived me and I ate. So the Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals.

You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. The woman, he said, To the woman he said, I will make your pains in childbearing very severe.

With painful labor, you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. To Adam he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, must not eat from.

[3 : 04] Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat food and it will, sorry, eat food from it all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you. You will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken.

For dust you are and to dust you will return. Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all living.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever. So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

[4 : 07] After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Amen. Thanks, Dorot. Let's pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we want to quieten our hearts before you now.

We want to pray and ask that you might be at work this morning by the power of your spirit for the sake of your glory. Lord, we've sung together of our need of you.

We know we need salvation. We know we are hungry to hear you speak. We know we are ignorant and need your wisdom.

We know that we are lost and need your salvation. Please, Lord, show us these things from your words this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[5 : 11] Amen. Well, you don't need me to tell you that we live in a world where things go wrong. Your experience will tell you that.

Things like sickness, unemployment, homelessness, relationship breakdown, poverty, war. And whenever we face things like that, especially when we face them personally, the question that comes to our mind is the question, why?

Why is this happening? Why is this happening to me? Why now? Who is to blame? How could this have been avoided? I'm sure you've asked those questions yourself about countless different situations that you've faced.

But what I want you to see this morning as we start is that the why question, the sort of instinctive why question that we all ask, is making in itself a massive assumption.

You see, the assumption of the question why that we ask when we suffer is that things shouldn't go wrong. Right? There's a category in our minds called the category right.

[6 : 20] And that's how things should be. And when that is not our experience and things are wrong, well, then something is broken. Something has gone wrong. In other words, and this is probably a more philosophical way to put it, the question why assumes that we were made for a world that is better than the one that we're currently experiencing.

Do you understand what I mean? It's assumption that really there's something not quite right about this. I was made for something better than this. Now, in a sense, that's quite simple.

But notice with me that the world has no good answer to that. Not only does it have no good answer to the why question, it has no good answer for why you ask why in the first place.

If the assumptions of the people who kind of make our TV, teach in our schools, rule our government are right, and there is no God, there's no creation, no Genesis 1 to 3, then, of course, along with ditching all of those things, they also ditch the category wrong.

Things just are. There's no design. There's no ideal. There's no moral being behind it all to determine what is right and wrong. The category is not wrong. The category is is.

[7 : 30] Things just are as they are. And our appeal to the idea that the world should be better to be right, well, that's just an illusion. Richard Dawkins puts it famously like this.

He says, Now, I don't know all of you in this room very well.

Now, I don't know all of you in this room very well.

I know most of you. It's great to have people with us this morning, who are guests with us. But let me ask you, in the midst of whatever it is that's going on in your life, does the question why feel to you like an illusion?

Does it feel to you as if it doesn't really matter? Does it feel as if justice is just irrelevant? Of course it doesn't, does it?

[8 : 35] Every fiber in our being when we're suffering is crying out, Why is this like this? In fact, this desire to live in a unbroken world is right there in the center of our hearts.

And we need to know, Why is this world broken? Who broke it? How did they break it? How can it be fixed? And those are our questions this morning. And we're going to find our answers in Genesis chapter 3.

So let's start this morning by setting the scene of Genesis chapter 3. And this is a little bit of a recap for those of you who've been here for the last few weeks. The scene in chapter 2 is the scene of the garden.

Now, hardly any of us in this room have gardens, but we sort of know what a garden is, don't we?

We know what that means. But if you remember back a couple of weeks, you'll know that there's something special about this garden. The garden isn't just, it's not like Kew Gardens.

I mean, it might have been, but it's not Kew Gardens just there to be looking nice. Really, the purpose of the garden is a place for God to be with his people. That's why he builds the garden.

The goal of creation was that God would be with his people in an endless day of rest.

[9 : 40] God with us. But I want you to notice now that in one sense, the garden is itself unfinished. So if you go back to chapter 2, verse 15, you read that man was put in the garden to take care of it.

Take a look at the verse. Let me read it to you. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. I don't know whether you've ever had a gardening job, right?

Surprising as it may seem to you, I once had a gardening job. I was about 14 and I gardened for an elderly lady who lived around the corner from where my parents lived. And my job there was to mow the grass, kind of trim the hedges and that kind of thing, and do a bit of weeding.

And on my first day on the job, when I turned up at this person's house to do the garden, I was met with her son, who was there to give me instructions. This is where the lawnmower is.

This is what a weed looks like, and these are the plants. Leave the plants, dig the weeds out, that kind of thing, right? Basic instructions on gardening. Now I think when you look at Genesis 2.15, God has put Adam in the garden to garden it.

[10:47] What you expect to come next are some sort of instructions on how to garden. Right, Adam? You'll need a spade. Make yourself a spade. You need to dig. You need to cultivate.

But actually when you look down, the immediate instructions for gardening are nothing to do with any of that. There's no lawnmower, there's no hedge trimmers, there's no plant identification. What do you get? Verse 16, And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

For when you eat from it, you will certainly die. Now maybe God did give some instructions on gardening as well. But as the writer puts this material together, he wants you to know that fundamentally the job of gardening in the Garden of Eden for Adam was not the work of a spade, but the work of obedience.

Obedience. Adam needs to obey God. Obedience to the will and instructions of his creator are the way that he will garden.

Seen in his refusal to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A tree that chapter 2 verse 9 tells you is in the middle of the garden next to the tree of life. Adam and Eve are not to eat from it.

[11:56] Now think about what's happening here. The implication is that the garden in Genesis 2 is not really the ultimate goal of God's creation. The goal of God's creation lies beyond the garden into what it has the potential to become through Adam's obedience.

Adam, I want you to develop and garden here. I want you to establish yourself here. I want you to be fruitful and multiply. And I want this garden to develop into something.

And if he does that, well, then the tree of life will be his. Obey me and you will eat from the tree of life. Recognizing that good and evil is not to be grasped at independently from God, but in fellowship with his creator, he is to obey him and receive all that he needs.

Now, there's lots of different ideas there. Let me try and land some of them with an illustration. I want you to imagine for a moment that you take a new job working as a chauffeur for VIP people. I think Luis had a job a little bit like this at one point, so you can maybe ask him whether this is true. But imagine that this job involves you driving a BMW 7 Series that's been specially modified.

[13:07] It has massage seats. It has one of those kind of sky headliners where you've got the little stars coming out the sky headliner like that. It's got bulletproof windows and all that kind of thing, right? You turn up for your first day of work.

Do you expect work to throw you the keys for the £200,000 BMW on your first day of work? Of course you don't, do you? Before you really get access to the keys, although access to the keys is going to be your job, right?

Before you get that job, what you are given instead are the keys to the Ford Fiesta van and you're told to drive to Watford to pick up the boss's dog from the vets. Why? Why are you told to do that? Well, because even though your job title is VIP chauffeur, really you start out your job on probation, don't you? You are on probation.

And although the BMW will be yours to drive one day, you are in the beginning being tested to see your faithfulness, to prove that you're able to drive the big car. You know, to see whether your manner with the vets and the dog is good enough for you to qualify for being accessed to the VIPs.

[14:14] You know, then after a couple of weeks, when you've proved yourself, you've not crashed the Fiesta and the boss's dog is not traumatized from driving with you, then on you go. Here's the BMW. Now, in a sense, that's what's going on in Genesis 2.

Adam and Eve have been made for eternal life in a flourishing garden where humanity will live for endless days in the presence of God with him. In a garden that they have filled and subdued, a place for God and his people to dwell together.

But before that, they're on probation in the garden. And not just them as two individuals, but in them, all of humanity are on probation.

And the keys of eternal life, if you like to carry on the illustration, symbolized in access to the tree of life is only going to be available to them if they obey the Lord.

They pass the probationary period. And so the focus here is obedience. Will they obey? A command which is not intended to prohibit from Adam and Eve knowing what is good and evil, but rather is to prohibit accessing that knowledge outside of relationship with the God who made them, outside of walking with him, growing in knowledge and understanding, wisdom and faith.

[15 : 34] So the question that's hanging at the end of chapter 2 is, will they garden faithfully in obedience and submission to gain access to the tree of life? Or will they go astray and ruin it all?

And that's the question. That's the scene. What's the action? Let's see the action. In chapter 3, verse 1, we meet Satan embodied in a serpent who comes to Eve and says, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

Now, of course, that's a lie, isn't it? The trees of the garden are provided as food for the people. So Eve responds and partially corrects the serpent. Verse 2, the woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden.

Oh no, we can eat. 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.

It's interesting, isn't it, that Eve's response gives way in part to the serpent's lie because she adds this idea that God has told them not to touch it, which is not really true. The serpent takes advantage of that weakness.

[16 : 44] He presses the woman. He says, verse 4, 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'll be like God's, knowing good and evil.

And then the woman looks at the fruit of the tree and sees it's good for food, it's pleasing to the eye, that it would make you wise. And so she eats and she gives to her husband and disobedience enters the garden.

Now, there are loads of things going on here. The serpent, who's assumed to be the devil by the rest of the scriptures, seems to be already established as an enemy of God by this point.

He is a created being, but his rebellion predates the one that we're reading about here, and we're not told about it. The origin of his evil is essentially a mystery, about which we probably best not to speculate.

But notice what we are told. Specifically, notice that the intention of the serpent is not just to get Adam and Eve to eat from the fruit. It wouldn't be enough, would it, if the serpent sort of put the fruit on the floor in front of Adam and Eve and then just kind of stuck his foot out, if he had a foot, to trip them over.

[17 : 53] And so they landed face-fail on the fruit and got a bit in their mouth and ate it. That wouldn't be enough, would it? No, because actually what the serpent is trying to do here is not just get them to eat the fruit, but he's trying to get them to eat the fruit by believing something untrue about God and who he is.

So notice what he says. He sells God as mean. God's just being harsh to you. He doesn't really want you to be like him. He doesn't really want you to have knowledge of good and evil.

He's being harsh with you. But of course, that's not the point. God is generously giving them all things, but all things in obedience to him, in submission to his will. And so the lie of the devil really is one of independence.

It's about grasping after the wisdom of the knowledge of good and evil outside of knowing God. It's saying, listen, this would be yours in relationship with him, but now reach for it independently of him and you will be like him, not in submission to him, but on a par, if not over him.

Jesus' famous illustration of this is in the parable of the lost son. You might know the story. In the story, the youngest son asks his father for his inheritance so he can go and spend it early.

[19 : 09] Now, the subtext of that is obvious, isn't it? It's not really about the money, just the money, is it? Because the money would one day be the son's. And really, the point is that the son is saying to the father, I wish you were dead.

I want your money now. I don't care about you. I would rather have that money now and spend it on myself in wild living. You're dead to me. And that's what Adam and Eve are saying here.

It's as if, you know, I know that wisdom of knowledge of good and evil will be found in obedience to you, that walking in obedience with you, you would teach me what good is. And I know what evil would be in contrast to that good.

But frankly, God, I want that now. And I want it for myself. I don't want it in obedience to you. I want it in rebellion from you. God, you are dead to me.

I will live for myself. Give me my inheritance now. Now, remember the scene that we set, because the problem here is not just that it's like every sin that you and I commit, although it is.

[20 : 14] Rather, the significance of Genesis 3 is that all of humanity are on probation in Adam and Eve. And because Adam has disobeyed, humanity is now guilty.

They were there for us. And not just that you and I would have done the same, although we most certainly would have done, but that we are included in them. All humanity disobey in Adam.

Adam crashes the Ford Fiesta and never gets the keys to the BMW. It's worth just pondering this for a moment, isn't it? According to the Bible, this is the root of everything that's wrong in the world.

This is where the good world that God made becomes the mixed broken world that we experience. This is why we suffer. This is why we get sick.

It's not just because we do things wrong, although we do, but often the link between what we do and what we experience is a little bit vague, isn't it? Rather, the reason that we suffer is because humanity was made for God, by God, to live in obedience to him.

[21 : 19] The very purpose of our existence being to glorify him and enjoy him. And in Adam, we rejected that, saying we'll be our own boss, our own gods, we'll get what we need ourselves, we'll do what we want, hoping to find in disobedience what was promised only through obedience.

And so the world was broken. It's perhaps a little bit like the story of David and Goliath. You know the story, don't you? Everyone loves the story of David and Goliath. Little David conquers giant Goliath, right?

And we like to read the story thinking of ourselves to be like David. We're the people who conquer the great giants. But really, actually, in the story, right? David is champion for Israel.

Goliath is champion for the Philistines. If David wins, Israel wins. If Goliath wins, the Philistines win. And in a sense, because Goliath loses, all of the Philistines lose with him.

And that's it here, isn't it? Adam, if you like, is our Goliath. And because he loses, we all lose with him. That's what's going on. He catastrophically fails and is defeated.

[22 : 26] And we're left in a broken world. Now, there's more to say on that. But let's think about the results. Observe the results. Notice that the results are immediate, yeah?

Adam and Eve realize that they are naked. It's not I don't think that they were ignorant of their nakedness before, but rather that now they can't look on their nakedness without suspicion and wrong desire.

Now this kind of shaped now by independent self-interest, admiration gives way to selfish lust. So they hide their bodies behind fig trees and they run from the presence of God.

They don't want to be anywhere near him. When God finds them, he knows what's happened and acts in judgment, judging the serpent and the woman and then the man. Look down at chapter three, verse 15.

The serpent's destruction is there prophesied at the foot of a human. And 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.

[23 : 25] The promise that we'll find is fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus, the one who will finally come and crush the serpent. For the woman, her role in creation is frustrated, as what should have brought pleasure now brings pain.

Childbearing is severe, labor is painful, and the role of helper is frustrated and frustrating to her. Look at verse 16. I will make your pains in childbearing very severe.

With painful labor, you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Adam is similarly cursed. Work becomes toil and he has promised to return to dust.

Death reigns instead of life. And finally, then they're thrown out of the temple garden, banished and excluded from the tree of life, which had been set ahead of them, with the cherubim's sword preventing their return.

Now again, there's loads there that we could look at, but let's just zoom in on this idea of returning to dust for a moment. God had promised Adam in chapter two, verse 17, that the day he ate from the tree, he would surely die.

[24 : 28] And here in chapter three, verse 19, although Adam doesn't die immediately, notice that the rot has already set in. Adam's body will return to dust. In a sense, really, what's happening is

everything here is being turned on its head.

Yes, so God put Adam in the garden to obey him and rule over creation, being helped by the woman to rule over all that's been made. Now, the serpent, part of God's creation, speaks to the woman who's there to help the man and she leads the man astray, who was there to submit to God and obey him and he disobeys.

And then what happens, instead of creation moving forwards to life, it moves backwards to death.

As death enters the garden, it descends into less than it was intended to be.

The stewards of the temple garden are now left rotting away. Adam was made to live in the presence of God and now excluded from his presence, life leaves with God.

Now, the consequences of Genesis three are not just here in these chapters, are they? They're all the way through the rest of the Bible and in our lives today. A relationship breakdown, natural disaster, frustrating work, painful childbearing and parenthood, estrangement from God, death, disaster, uncertain futures, fragile lives, disconnection from a sense of purpose.

[25 : 46] All of that is our experience. And there's a sense in which that experience kind of grows. So just like the garden was meant to become a town and a city where God dwelt with his people, so now the backwards is growing, isn't it?

As the land of rebellion has grown and developed into towns and cities and nations of rebellion, they build a giant tower, gather all the world together, a few chapters down in Genesis.

But the collective moral weight of six billion sinners is greater than just two in the garden. And this then is the Bible's answer to the why question. Why?

Why do we suffer? Well, it's not, you know, do something wrong and something appropriately bad will happen. It's more nuanced than that, isn't it? Good things do happen to bad people and bad things seem to happen to good people.

Now, the point is that we live in a world of rebels under the judgment and curse of the God who made us. The world is broken from its purpose, undone by its creator. It brings thorns and thistles faster than plants.

[26 : 49] It means the relationships between men and women are marked by power plagues.

That's, I think, what's going on here when the woman's desire will be for the man and he will rule over her. It is not that she longs for him, but she longs for his role and his role is now abusive and power hungry rather than loving and one of mutual help.

Now, Adam chose a world without God and God hands him over to the chaos of that. You want me out the garden? Now you are out the garden on your own. I think probably the greatest challenge has been for me in this series in Genesis 1-3 is that lots of this is kind of philosophical and feels a bit theoretical, doesn't it?

But this is real, right? As I was praying in my study this morning, preparing the final bits of this message, the office phone rang from David, Solomon Peter's son, to say that he'd passed away. This is the world of death, it's the world that we live in, isn't it? And these things, although kind of philosophically important, are personally painful, aren't they? We live in a world under the curse of sin where death reigns.

Not because God is not good, not because God doesn't care. Now actually, the God of Genesis 3 is a God of promise and he's keeping his promises.

[28 : 19] Now the problem in the world is that our first parents and us in them pushed God out and enthroned ourselves and our holy God cannot ignore that. A university friend of mine who was really clever did mechanical engineering at university and went on to do various different things but one of the things that he did was he ran his own garage.

What he found was that garages were really bad at repairing complicated cars. See, he found that if you took your complicated car to the garage, they'd do two or three things to it and if they couldn't work it out from that then they couldn't fix it.

So they'd plug their machine in and it wouldn't say anything and then they would go underneath it with their torch they couldn't find anything and so they couldn't fix it. And he worked out that basically if you're going to fix complicated cars the thing that you need to know is what the problem is.

He was really good at understanding what the problem is which meant that he could fix it. If you don't understand what the problem is you can't really fix it.

That's the case, isn't it, in our world as well. Why do so many things that we try not actually fix our lives and our trouble?

[29 : 37] It's because they don't really understand the problem, do they? Atheism or even agnosticism basically thinks that the problem in the world is bad luck. So the solution to a world where the problem is bad luck is good luck, right?

Do everything you can to be lucky. Do everything that you can to kind of swerve the problems. And of course that doesn't work, does it? Because actually bad things still happen. Things like Islam or Catholicism and its raw form and other religions tell you that the problem in the world is that we do things wrong.

If the problem in the world is that you do things wrong what's the solution? Do things right. Yeah? But that doesn't work, does it? Not only because it doesn't matter how hard I try I can't do everything right it doesn't work because even when I do things right still things go wrong.

There are many people in the hospitals in London who are more moral and upright than any of us in this room. Doing things right is not the answer. But if Genesis 3 is right if the problem is not just that we personally are disobedient which itself would be bad enough but also that we belong to a condemned race that has been banished from God's presence and is under the curse of sin then you and I need a way more radical fix than good works or good luck to fix it.

We need a new creation. We need a new Adam and that is Jesus promised in our passage in chapter 3 verse 15 as we saw introduced in the scriptures as a second Adam.

[31 : 10] God doesn't so much create a new man from the dust rather it's as if God takes the dust to himself and is born as a baby. God the son uniting himself with weak human frail flesh and he lives in this broken world outside of the garden and he too is tested by the devil probation 2.0 and the devil tries the same tactic again.

He says to Jesus doesn't he Jesus I know you're born the king I know you're born to rule the nations and I know that the way that you will rule the nations is in obedience to your father obedience to the father which will take you all the way to the cross but Jesus forget that for a moment won't you just bow down and worship me and I'll give you all of that.

Obedience is such a long path this is much quicker this is much easier and you don't have to die surely Jesus you want this don't you just bow down and worship me and unlike the first Adam this second Adam resists the devil and is obedient right up to death itself you know that the first Adam was intended to obey in order to receive eternal life and pass on life to us but the first Adam disobeyed and passed on death to us all right the second Adam Jesus is obeying all the way to death and handing on life to you and me as the second Adam rises again ascends into heaven and promises to prepare a place for us to dwell with God not a garden but a city a city temple that he will bring listen as we close to how the Bible describes that city says this in Revelation 22 then the angel showed me that's John the river of the water of life clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city on each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing 12 crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations no longer will there be any curse the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads there will be no more night they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever notice the tree of life is there and we have access to it unyielding access because it's there yielding its fruit every single month you can eat and eat and eat the tree is there access to the tree given through the obedience of the second Adam

Jesus Christ let me just close with this if perhaps this morning the why question why am I suffering is deeply personal to you maybe you're wondering why am I so lonely why is it so hard to find a job why is my family in such disarray why is marriage so difficult why have I got so little money why is my health failing well let me tell you don't despair the truth is you weren't made for this wilderness you were made for this city that we've just been reading about an entry to this city is not through your good works or not even through good luck entrance to this city is through the obedience of Jesus Christ obedience all the way to death and so for you and I if you want to exit this wilderness for this city we're to come to Jesus and say I trust in you

I love you I want you to be my Adam that I might receive the benefits of your obedience instead of the curse of Adam's disobedience and if you do that there will be a day it's not going to be necessarily today but there will be a day as sure as you know where all your wounds will be healed

all the tears will be wiped from your eyes all the sorrows will be undone and in one sense the beauty of that day and of that city will be even more glorious because of the darkness of today and the wilderness we're in come Lord Jesus come Lord Jesus let me pray and then we'll sing Heavenly Father as we come to you thank you that we come to a God who knows what life is like in the brokenness of this world and thank you that in your son the Lord Jesus you have done all that needs to be done to take sinners like us to the glorious city of your holy presence so we pray please [36 : 28] Lord that you would keep us trusting in Jesus keep our eyes fixed on him in the midst of the pain and the difficulty and the frustration and even the temporary joys of this life keep us looking to Jesus and trusting in all that he has done in his name we pray Amen in all that he's