

Sin: The Curse and the Cure

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Preacher: Ali Sewell

- [0 : 0 0] We're looking through the second half of Genesis chapter 3 this morning, those verses that we've just read. It would be good to keep your Bibles open there. And let me begin with a bold claim about our passage this morning, which is this.
- This chapter gives us the most accurate, the most true to life description of the world we live in out of any writing or idea or philosophy that is out there.
- And that tries to answer that big question of how we got here and why we experience the universe in the way that we do. I hope that we'll see and be convinced of that in our time this morning.
- These opening chapters of Genesis describing the creation of a perfect world, as we've seen in chapters 1 and 2. But then it's fall, as we began to look at last week.
- It's deterioration, as we'll see this morning. That maps onto our world better than any alternative description. We live in a universe that some people have described as beautiful ruins.
- [1 : 1 4] A universe where there is stunning beauty enough to give us an idea of and a yearning for perfection. That's what we are made for. But also, at the very same time, a place of incredible hardship.
- And along with that also, just the day-to-day struggle of life. Showing us that we're not in that perfection now. That things aren't all as they should be.
- And again, we don't need to be convinced of that. If those ideas resonate with us, we're going to see why that is as we look at this chapter together.
- And I hope we'll be convinced, as I've said, that these chapters make the best sense of our world. And as always, if you've got any questions about that, or if you've got any areas where you remain kind of unconvinced, or you just wonder how that fits with what you see around you, I'd love to chat more about all of these things afterwards.
- So please do come in and find me and follow up on any of the things that we say this morning. Just to get our bearings here, remember, if you were with us last week, James helped us look through the first half of this chapter, chapter 3 of Genesis, where we saw sin coming into the world.
- [2 : 2 5] We saw the nature of sin in questioning and ultimately rejecting God's Word. We saw humanity refusing to live in trusting obedience to their generous Creator, and just the tragedy of that.
- And this week, we're going to see the consequences of that sin. Last week, we kind of saw that the stone being thrown into the pool. This week, we look at the waves and the ripples it caused and continues to cause to this day.
- But again, we'll see that despite that, there is still hope. The Bible gives us a hope, not that we're going to sort ourselves out, not that we're going to fix everything, but the hope that God hasn't forgotten the people and the world that he created.

So that's our plan for this morning. We'll look at that in kind of two halves. The first one we'll call the curse of sin. The curse of sin. Here's the consequences, the fallout of that first act of sin, how that shapes what we see here in the Bible, and how also that shapes the world that we live in day by day.

This is particularly verses 14 down to 19, where God gives out his judgment on what is going to happen due to this failure to obey.

[3 : 48] Before we get into the details of that, you can see in those verses there that God addresses the serpent, who, as we saw last week, represents Satan himself. He addresses the woman, Eve.

He then addresses Adam, the man. We saw last week they'd all been involved in this first sin in different ways. They've done different things, but all responsible, all culpable for their disobedience and these consequences that flow out of that.

We'll look through each of those in turn. But I do want to flag up the big picture before that, which is to say this, that the Bible's view of the world is that everything is affected by this sin.

And so this, we'll see here some particular areas that are highlighted. That's going to be spiritual. It's going to be family. It's going to be work. It's good to focus in on those, these big areas.

But the point here from Genesis chapter 3 onwards isn't that everything is perfect, except for these few exceptions over here. No, the point is that we now live in what we call, in Christianity, what we call in the church, a fallen world, where everything is tainted by sin and the struggles that cause.

[5 : 01] So we see that first with the serpent, and the idea here of spiritual struggle. As we said, the serpent representing Satan, God's opponent, the embodiment of evil, or we might say Satan acting in the form of a serpent, the instigator of the sin, leading people away from God that we saw last week.

And so God first curses the serpent. And actually that in itself is a sign of God's authority over him. That reminder that Satan and God aren't kind of equal and opposite, yin and yang, or whatever, as the world often kind of pictures things.

But actually God is incomparably greater. He is able to dictate to Satan and not vice versa. And actually that's the grounds of the hope that we'll get to as we carry on through this passage.

But here at the beginning, perhaps of most significance to us here, is that promise that because Satan has been allowed in, because he was listened to, because his words took root, we now live in a world of ongoing spiritual struggle.

Verse 15 there, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. That's not saying from now on people aren't going to like snakes. It's talking about the spiritual conflict that runs through the generations.

[6 : 26] Again, we see that traced through the big story of the Bible. The offspring of the serpent, being those who oppose God and his purposes, and the offspring of Eve, those seeking to follow him, those two kind of battling against each other throughout the pages of Scripture.

Actually, a kind of fascinating example of that, I think, is David and Goliath. That's probably a story that we all know fairly well. Actually, in the original language, Goliath is described using an unusual word as wearing scale armor, the same kind of scales that a serpent would have.

He's also described as clad in bronze, which sounds in Hebrew very much like the word for snake. It's just this kind of reminder, just this little picture that this clash is the offspring of the serpent in Goliath against David, the offspring of Eve, God's people.

An example of that opposition being worked out throughout the pages of the Bible. And we continue to see that in our world today, where to be one of God's people, to look to follow him, often doesn't mean a peaceful path through life, but it means opposition.

You can see that really clearly. And obviously, can't you, in nations where the church is overtly persecuted. That's a very obvious example, but we see it in our country and in our lives as well.

[7 : 54] Someone was telling me just this last week about a church they knew who'd raised the money, a great amount of money to buy a certain building for their church to move into. But having done all that, gone through all that process, the owner decided actually, he didn't want an evangelical church to be moving into his building.

He decided to sell it to someone else as well. And that's not an isolated, that's not a one-off incident. There's an ongoing reality to this spiritual struggle.

And it's important that we're not naive to that. If we wonder where that's from, if we wonder even just in our own lives, why is it some people seem so hostile to the gospel and to Christianity?

And by extension to us, if we speak about those things or proclaim those things, well, again, we can trace that back to this point. Genesis chapter three, making sense of the world that we live in.

So there's this spiritual element we see here, but following on from that, things get a lot more physical. In some ways, we might say more kind of day-to-day or what we think of as kind of mundane.

[9 : 01] Because in speaking to Eve, to the woman, we see the effects of this sin on family life. First verse 16, to the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

In pain, you shall bring forth children. I was present at the birth of our three children, so I feel pretty well qualified to speak about the pain of childbirth. Not really, it looked awful.

But there's this kind of pattern that begins here, where what is good, God's command to be fruitful and multiply, as God had said, the blessing of children, the gift that he'd given, that's not taken away, that's not undone, but it is tainted.

Pain and hardship is added to what is a good thing. I think it's right to include here not just the pain of the act of giving birth, but also the ongoing challenges, physical, mental, emotional, of raising children.

And that is not an easy thing. I wonder if you've ever stopped to wonder, why is that so hard when it seems like it should be so natural? Again, it's because we live in a world that is tainted by sin.

[10 : 14] That affects everything. It includes here the other family relationship of husband and wife, or again, I think we could say here male and female more generally too.

The rest of verse 16, your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. The idea here again is that breakdown of the good relationships described at the end of Genesis 2, and instead division, conflict, an unhealthy desire to dominate, and in turn, a tendency toward unloving domination over.

Again, something we see play out in our world throughout history and into the present, where there is strife and tension in relationships, and often oppression between the sexes, rather than the loving partnership that was God's plan.

God created good marriage, the distinction of male and female that is not removed, but again, it's tainted. It's not the perfection it once was.

And then thirdly, in speaking to the man, to Adam, God addresses the subject of work, spiritual, family, and work. Another huge area of life, isn't it?

[11 : 32] Verse 17, And here, perhaps more than anywhere, we need to remember that work in itself is not a result of the fall.

Remember, in the perfection of Eden, man and woman are given work to do. That's a thing of real dignity, a thing of real value. But through the fall, work becomes frustrated and frustrating.

Again, can you see that pattern where sin doesn't destroy what God has said is good, but it twists it. And so work becomes toil.

And it's written here as if work itself is trying to kind of take over and rule over man, rather than be an expression of man ruling over creation, as God had given him authority to.

And we so often, again, see in our world that tendency for work to take over life rather than to be a healthy aspect of it. And then this section ends with that very somber analysis of life in our fallen world.

[13 : 04] By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you are taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

You work until you die, that verse is saying. And it's pretty bleak, isn't it? And death itself there is the ultimate consequence of sin, the ultimate pain, the ultimate sorrow, the ultimate sadness that we experience, which hurts, and which was never supposed to be part of our world.

And so this chapter is tough reading, isn't it? This chapter is an incredible kind of crash from the highs and perfection of chapter 2 to the very depths of despair almost in chapter 3 where sin kind of gets its teeth into and infects everything.

It's spiritual, it's physical, it's family life, it's work life, it's with other people, it's with the earth itself. And the emphasis being humanity is the kind of pinnacle of God's creation made in the image of God, given great responsibility, that as humanity rejects God's rule, it has dire consequences for the whole of creation.

I remember a number of years ago reading this chapter, Genesis chapter 3, to one of our girls from a children's Bible that we have and you had all the pictures that you can imagine of a little snake and of Eve passing an apple to Adam and both of them eating it.

[14 : 42] And we got to the end and she looked at me and she sort of nodded and she said, well, that was kind and I must have looked slightly confused and so she said, that was good sharing with the apple.

And I tried to explain, I obviously hadn't explained things that well that she slightly missed the point here, that was not the moral of the story because this is very much not good, is it?

It's actually the complete opposite of that sin and its consequences are tragic and we experience them every day. When we look at the brokenness of our world which is so clear in so many areas, it's all traced back to here.

And so I suppose that the big question is, well, what are we supposed to do with this information? If this is not a passage which it isn't about the kind of the joys of sharing, you know, what difference does this make?

Why is Genesis chapter 3 here? Well, I think two things. Firstly, as we've already said, it helps us understand and in light of that get our expectations right for the world that we live in.

[15 : 49] If we hold up the Bible's picture against our world where we see this perfection but disrupted, sort of twisted in every area, we actually say, yeah, that fits with the world we live in.

That fits with the world we experience day by day. That fits with the world that we see on our televisions. And so if you feel that there is something good, that there's something valuable about family, but it's just so hard and it's perhaps a real source of pain for you this morning, or if you recognise there's a real dignity to work, but it can just be so tiring and frustrating and hard to keep in its right place, or if you're a Christian and you're trying to live following God but that is not a smooth road and there is struggle and opposition and people react badly and our very culture seems to make that hard and push against that, if you feel those things, will these verses say yes, you're right in thinking those things?

Or similar examples in different areas of life. That doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. That is the world that we live in. Because of sin, we all find ourselves outside of the garden, outside of Eden, outside of perfection where this chapter finishes up.

Separated from God's perfect presence, separated from the very source of life itself and unable to force our way back in however hard we might try.

or perhaps to flip that around, if we think that we're going to find our full satisfaction in any of these areas of life, if I could just get that job or if we could just sort that relationship or if my kids would just behave in this way or if I just got those exam results or anything else that we set our mind to here on earth, if that is as high as our horizon goes, then we are going to find frustration and disappointment because all of those things, as good as they might be, all of those things are tainted due to the sin that we see here in Genesis chapter 3.

[18:11] This passage gives us a right expectation about the world that we live in and it does that with kind of bleak and stark honesty and that can be a tough thing to face up to.

But the second function of this passage then, I think in light of that, is to cause us to look further and to recognise that actually there must be more.

This passage is supposed to leave us kind of yearning for a return to the perfection, a return to life in its fullness, truly satisfied in the presence of God, that stands in such stark contrast to what we see in chapter 3 and again, what we see being worked out in the world around us.

We're to read this and kind of ask the questions, well how could we get back to the garden? How could we get back to the tree of life that we're separated from? How could we get back to God, the separation from whom is the most serious consequence and the root cause of all these other sorrows we see?

We're led to ask those questions, but also here in Genesis chapter 3, we don't need to ask those questions in a despairing way, but rather in a way that is there to pick up on the kind of glimmers of hope that are given to us in this chapter and that's what we'll look at secondly.

[19:38] We've seen the curse of sin, but here also in chapter 3, right as things go wrong, at the very start of the problem, we're also given hope as we're pointed to the cure for sin.

Let's see where that is in these verses and primarily we would say it's here in verse 15, as God curses Satan, as God speaks about that ongoing conflict between the descendants of Satan and the descendants of Eve, he also suggests that actually that's not an eternal battle, but that a victor will come from Eve's descendants.

Now look at what it says there, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. That same word for bruise, it can also mean to crush or to batter.

This picture is this ongoing struggle, but that ultimately there will be one who brings decisive victory, that the head of the serpent will be crushed, that Satan will be defeated, even though this comes at great cost, that the heel of that victory is also struck at, bruised, afflicted.

And so right from the beginning, even as God is giving out his judgment, the consequences of sin, already he's providing hope of a rescuer, a descendant of Eve who will come and undo what has gone wrong here in this chapter.

[21 : 10] And in these verses it's just a kind of a flicker of hope, isn't it? You could so easily just read past that in what feels like a pretty dark and gloomy chapter. You certainly couldn't read that verse and from it kind of unfold or predict the rest of the Bible's story.

That hope is there that this snake crusher will come and then the rest of the Bible sets about bringing that into sharper and sharper focus.

We see here it will be one who is the offspring of Eve. Genesis chapter 12 we saw in our kids talk last week it through a descendant of Abraham. Further on through the Old Testament we're told he will be of the line of David.

This picture crystallising, this point sharpening until of course it leads us to Jesus, the descendant of Eve, the offspring of Abraham, the line of David who on the cross defeats Satan once and for all, where Satan bruises his heel as Christ suffers and dies, but Jesus crushes Satan's head.

That ultimate victory as he rises again undoing the work of sin and death, opening the way back to God's presence and the true life that it brings.

[22 : 33] This passage tells us that God still cares for humanity in our fallen world. We see that as God clothes Adam and Eve, even as they're sent from the garden, as they're unable to cover themselves with their little kind of fig leaves that they've tried to sew together, they still have to be hiding in the trees in chapter three.

Well, God provides clothing for them, a tunic that's often translated as so that even as they're away from him, they're looked after. But the hint and the hope is that that separation won't be forever.

And again, that separation is solved only through Jesus. Adam and Eve sent out of the garden. God puts there this cherubim who in the Bible aren't cute, sort of podgy little baby angels.

They are big, powerful, strong. Here they are wielding a flaming sword. The point of this passage is clear that humanity cannot make its way back in.

They can't get back to God or they will die trying. And yet Jesus comes as fully human. Jesus comes outside of Eden into the fallen world that we live in.

[23 : 47] Jesus suffers that death for us so that we can return. He suffers the consequences and the judgment of sin, living his days in a fallen world, suffering death and separation from God on the cross.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He cries as he takes the sin of the world and its consequences on himself on the cross so that we are able to return to God's presence.

That the cure for sin given here at the beginning of the Bible and all the way through is not anything that we can do, but it is Christ and what he has done for us, which means that we can be welcomed back to God and back into the perfection of Eden.

Just as we close, that doesn't mean, and you'll know this already, that doesn't mean that because Jesus has been, everything is now perfect. That's not what the Bible says and again as we've seen, that's not the world that we live in.

The effects of sin, of the fall, are still everywhere, shading every part of our life and our world. And yet because Jesus has been, because he died and rose again, we can be certain that the victory has been won, Satan has been defeated, and that perfection will be restored.

[25 : 15] And that's the hope. The Bible is always pointing us forward to a certain hope about a certain restoration which has been won for us in the gospel by Jesus alone.

Let me read from the very final chapter of the Bible. This is Revelation chapter 20, a picture showing us where all this is heading. And again, with very deliberate echoes of Eden, but kind of more, more developed, more, even better, kind of Eden 2.0, even better than the original, but which we are invited into through Jesus.

That chapter says this, Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads, and night will be no more.

[26 : 25] They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. And that incredible kind of pictorial language there used in Revelation, there is that return to the tree of life, to the rivers of Eden, to perfection with the cursed undone, to the nations being healed, and most importantly, to the presence of God himself and our worship of him.

Genesis 3 shows us the world we all live in, the curse of sin, the realities of life in a fallen world so that we can steel ourselves to live wisely in that world, not spend our days constantly disappointed by looking for things which we're never going to find.

But it also points us forward to the world that we all want, the cure for sin, the victory of Jesus, the snake crusher over sin and death, and the perfection he welcomes us into, and which is still to come.

Not because of our efforts, not because humanity will restore perfection or bring in some kind of utopia, but because God continues to care for his broken world.

And he alone has and will put all things right through the good news out of Jesus Christ, promised from the very beginning. Let's pray together.

[27 : 58] Let's pray. Thank you.