

WORLD VIEW SERMON SERIES

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WORLD VIEW - FALL

Genesis 3

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Some years ago, someone wrote a book entitled 'Christ is the Answer'. In reply someone wrote an article 'If Christ is the answer, then what is the question?' That is a good question. What is the value of the Christian faith? Why believe? Why baptize our children? What good does it do? What does Christ answer? Well, we would reply Jesus is our hope and the answer to all the world's problems. Through his suffering on the cross Jesus brought the solution to the huge issues of life. But your work-mate might say, probably a bit irate, 'How does that work? What does Jesus' dying on a cross have to do with my father battling with cancer? What has Jesus' death on the cross have to do with earthquakes and cyclones? What has Jesus got to do with my kid's reading problems or the lack of funds for our school? What has Jesus dying on some cross have to do with the Melbourne traffic congestion or pollution? What? To say Jesus is the answer to the world's problems is ridiculous.'

Is it? It all depends on your worldview, on how you see the big picture of life. Remember a worldview is a set of beliefs that is the basis for how we view reality. It is what we assume about how everything came into being, what it means to be human, how we decide what is right or wrong. The Bible provides us with a set of glasses with which to look at the world. These glasses help us test the ideas behind the theory and practice of work, or science or politics etc. A simple test to work out a person's worldview is to ask four questions: Where am I? Who am I? What is wrong? What is the answer? The worldview we get from the Bible can be summed up under the headings: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration.

So, as a worldview issue, let's assume that life on this planet is just the result of a big bang, that there is no God and that we are the chance products of fate floating around on a planet in one of billions of galaxies. Then, yes, it's very hard to see how Jesus' death on a cross has anything to do with solving the deeply painful issues of life. In fact, under those assumptions Jesus' death doesn't do anything for us. But let's have a look at another worldview, one based on faith in the teachings of the Bible. The Bible

says the world was created by the word of God. The magnificent picture of Genesis 1 is of God speaking "Let there be..." and of creation responding in obedience "...and it was so!" A creation that through its obedience greatly honours God. "And God saw all he had made, and it was very good." We as human beings were also created by God. Like everything else we are his creatures, called to obey and respond in great praise. But there is also a stunning difference. We as humans were created in God's image. We resemble and represent him in the created world. Our response of obedience is not just by instinct as it is by the birds and animals. Nor is it just by built in structures like the plants and chemical reactions. No, we have been created to respond to God out of our own free will, out of deep love and fellowship with God.

But having that freedom means there was also the possibility that God's image bearers might decide not to respond. We know what that is about. It is the painful risk we experience each time we let our children grow up and encourage them to be their own person. Children can be cute when they are little. But they soon grow up with their own minds. With a stick big enough, and a willingness to use it, we could ensure our children are never (outwardly) disobedient. But we would crush their spirit. So, we cautiously give our kids freedom and responsibility as they grow. And at times the result is deeply disappointing and painful. That cute baby has become a raging teenager. But the pain we feel is nothing in comparison to God's pain as Adam and Eve disobeyed his Word. The result of that action was of catastrophic proportions. What we have here is the answer to the question: What is wrong?

The Fall into sin and its effects is seen in Genesis 3. And what we see is that sin is a distortion of the word of God and a disobedience of his Word. That is the nature of sin. Instead of heeding the Word of God and obeying, it does the opposite. That's why it's so devastating. All that exists comes into being by obedience to the word. Sin distorts and goes against the word. Notice, first, the distortion. Compare Genesis 2:16&17 with Genesis 3:1. In Genesis 2 God puts the man in the garden and says (:16) *"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..."*. So where can the man eat from? 'Anywhere, it's all for you, except one. That's the test tree. But for the rest, enjoy!' Now notice 3:1. Satan speaking through the serpent says, *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* You see the distortion? God is made out to be a terrible miser instead of a generous giver. That is what sin does. It takes the good creation, God's wonderful gifts and distorts them. Take for example our sexuality. Instead of just reproducing as other as other creatures do, God gave us the wonderful gift of intimacy and pleasure as husband and wife. But our culture often implies God, and Christians who follow him, are dreadful prudes, taking away the joys of sexual freedom.

Now compare with me Genesis 2:17 with Genesis 3:4. In Genesis 2 God says to the man, "...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." And in Genesis 3, the serpent, after creating doubt in the woman with his distortion says, "You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God". Here we have the direct contradiction to the word of God. Satan simply calls God a liar, who is deceiving Eve to deprive her. That is at the heart of sin. It is to go against God's word and disobeys the laws he has set into the creation and into our relationships. God says, "You shall have no other gods besides me". But humanity says we will worship what we please, the gods of our own making. God says, "You shall not steal, you shall not murder, you shall not lie..." but we go right ahead and do it all, either outright theft and murder, or we cheat with our tax, and scandalize one another. And then wonder why we live in a broken and devastated world. The motive for our disobedience, is found in the words of the serpent in Genesis 3:5 "...your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." In our sin we don't want to be obedient creatures, praising God. We want to be god of our own life, bringing all praise to ourselves.

Now the result of sin is the distortion of all our relationships. Which, if you think about it, is the natural consequence. If everything exists as an obedient response to God's word, then disobedience will have a devastating effect. That the world doesn't spin out into total chaos and misery is due to God's 'common grace' restraining sin in our lives. With sin there is disobedience instead of obedience, distortion, the lie instead of truth, death instead of life. God said to the man "When you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ... you will surely die." And what we see in the rest of Genesis 3 is the effect of this 'dying'. We see that it affects everything. First of all, we see spiritual death, the breakdown in the relationship between God and his image bearers. Look at Genesis 3:8 "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees." How tragic! God himself would join them in the late afternoon and discuss the day's joys and discoveries. And now they hide in fear. Now they don't want to know God. You ever wonder how we can come up with all sorts of scientific theories that totally ignore God? Because we now, naturally, avoid him. To admit God's existence is to introduce guilt and repentance, the need for obedience. But we don't want that. And without the work of the Holy Spirit sinful human beings are spiritually dead. We couldn't respond if we wanted. Secondly, we see physical death is mentioned here, that most painful separation of body and soul when a human life is ended. Genesis 3:19 God says, speaking of a hard life, "...until you return to the ground since from it you were taken, dust you are and to dust you will return." Whether through sickness or accident, old age or

war, death always hits us hard. That is especially so as we lay the body in the ground and the loved one is gone, no more than dust on this earth. Thirdly we see that sin has its deep social, relational impact. We notice in Genesis 3:7,16 that the man and woman *"...saw they were naked..."* and were ashamed. Their relationships were changed. Marriage breakdown, dysfunctional families, debilitating poverty, rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, racial tension, poor education, it all stems from our relational brokenness. Fourthly we see in our text that the environment is deeply affected by sin. Genesis 3:17 *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."* The earth is cursed because of human disobedience, for we are the pinnacle of creation as God's image bearers. So devastating floods, heartbreaking drought, deadly earthquakes and so on all have their ultimate source in human sin. And that doesn't mention the devastation caused by our pollution and over use of the earth and its resources. So, what we see is that the whole of creation is deeply affected by sin, every aspect, every relationship. Everything is twisted and distorted. The creation is still there, by God's common grace, but it's all distorted. Even our image bearing of God is still there. But it's grossly distorted. The result of that is that all human beings are still inherently religious. We cannot live without God or a god of our making. Every culture in history has its gods, even ours today.

Now if we compare Genesis 1 with Genesis 3 we get this understanding. Genesis 1:31 says, *"God saw all he had made and it was very good."* Therefore, nothing in creation is intrinsically evil. Nothing is evil from the beginning. But now everything is sin affected. Why do I make that point? Well because a lot of thinking, even certain theology, has been affected by Greek philosophy and Gnostic dualism. When the Greeks were converted to Christianity they took their cultural baggage with them (like we still do today). Gnosticism said that physical, material things like our bodies, the earth, were inherently evil. And spiritual things were intrinsically good. So certain sections of Christian theology have taught that the body is the cause of our passions and problems. And what God does through Jesus is to 'save our souls', which will eventually go to heaven. The thinking has also brought about the teaching that life has two parts, the sacred (holy) and the secular (world). Things such as politics, business, sex, were seen as worldly. Things such as religion, the church, theology, were holy. The result was that in the Middle Ages people were encouraged to leave the world and live holy lives in monasteries. Protestant groups used to identify things like card playing, movie going, and women wearing makeup as worldly and sinful. The thought was if you stayed away from those things, you were all right. But the Bible would say everything made by God was good and has a place and purpose. But now everything is affected by

sin. Even the best we want to do for God in preaching, worship, caring for others is affected by sin.

Our calling as Christians is to tackle each area of life, and claim it for the kingdom of God. So, should we be involved in politics or business or the arts? Sure. But in each area, we don't just go along with everybody else. We think through very carefully, 'How has sin distorted this aspect of God's creation?'. How can we change it, so we are more obedient to God's ways? We need the insight and the courage to challenge the ideas behind certain ways of thinking, to challenge the systems of business or education or social life that are not God honouring. The constant question in our hearts as Christians, whether we are mums and dads at home, a couple in love, children at school, active in sport, at work as economists and accountants, carpenters and plumbers, IT specialists and teachers, musicians and ministers, is 'How can I do this activity in greater obedience to God?' We may not get very far in some areas. The challenge and resistance from others may be too great. But we struggle as those who already smell, already know, the victory, because we know Jesus has and is the answer.

How so? Well that has to do with the theme of Redemption, rather than the Fall, which is next week's topic. But let me say that the life of Jesus was one of complete obedience, actively in the whole of his life and passively on the cross. He lived in complete praise of God in everything he did. By his obedience he has broken through sin. By his death and resurrection, he has paid the penalty for sin. Therefore, God as creator and Lord will make all things new, with sin gone. That's why Jesus is the answer to all the world's problems. That's why baptism, the sign and symbol of what Jesus has done, and will do, is so important. The sign of being cleansed by water is the reminder of our forgiveness in Jesus and our hope in a troubled world.