

The first sermon

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[0 : 01] Well, please turn with me in your Bibles, if you have one with you, to the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. The word Genesis means beginning, and in the book of Genesis we're introduced to the beginning of all things, the beginning of creation, the beginning of God's creation of man and woman in his image and after his likeness, the beginning of the fall, the entrance into sin into the world, and the beginning of God's promise to remedy the tragedy that had overtaken the cosmos with the fall, the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the garden.

Genesis chapter 3 is perhaps one of the most familiar passages in the Bible and possibly the most significant passage in the Bible.

If you don't understand Genesis 3, you will never understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, if you don't understand the first three chapters of Genesis, the Bible as a whole will be a mystery to you.

So Genesis chapter 3. Now the serpent 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? The woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it or you will die.

[2 : 00] 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 will be like God, knowing good and evil.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. 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, so I hid.

[3 : 16] 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 serpent 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.

Because he will crush your head and you will strike at his heel. We give thanks to God for his true and living word.

Well, please turn with me in your Bibles if you have one and follow with me. It's not my intention to expound these first 15 verses in Genesis 3, but especially to consider with you what we read in the 15th verse, which is actually the first sermon that we encounter in the Bible.

[5 : 00] And the first sermon we encounter in the Bible is preached by Almighty God himself. Where God addresses Satan in the guise of a serpent, this bizarre, mysterious encounter that this unholy creature has with Adam and Eve.

Instead of looking at one another and saying, animals don't talk. They talk in Walt Disney. They don't talk in real life. There's something wrong going on here.

They are bewitched and bewildered by this beguiling serpent. And Adam makes the excuse, the woman you gave me.

And then the Lord addresses the woman and she says, the serpent beguiled me. And then from verse 14, the Lord focuses his attention on the deceiver himself.

Who is called in the New Testament, the deceiver of the people of God. And it's in verse 15 that we come across the very first gospel promise in the Bible.

[6 : 20] In the wake of the tragedy of Adam's sin, bringing down the whole of humanity with him, him being the covenant head of humanity.

As in Adam, as in Adam, all die. The Lord addresses the serpent and says, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike at his heel. As I said in the introduction, this is perhaps the most important and significant chapter in the whole Bible.

It explains to us why the world is the way it is. And the world is the way it is not because it lacks education, not because it lacks opportunity, but because it has walked out on its creator.

The world is the way it is because we are the way we are. It's because we are what we are.

[7 : 38] Men and women in rebellion against God at the very core of our beings that this world is the way it is. Genesis 3 explains that to us.

This is why the world is the way it is. But then secondly, it explains to us that in the midst of the darkness and tragedy of what we read here, God announces a message of hope.

As I said, these words are the first sermon ever preached. And they're preached by almighty God himself.

And very simply, there are two elements to this first sermon that I want to focus on with you. More briefly, the first, and then a little more at length, the second. First of all, the Lord speaks a word of solemn judgment.

He, the seed of the woman, the offspring of the woman, He will crush your head. God directly confronts the deceiver.

[8 : 57] And right at the outset, in the Bible, we're being informed of something that we desperately, day after day after day, need to take to heart.

That there is an enemy out there. An enemy who is out to do his hellish worst.

To do harm to the people of God. And to do despite to the kingdom of God. Your enemy, the devil, says the first letter of Peter, like a roaring lion, is just waiting to pounce.

This, I found it these past two or three years, I find my mind often reflecting on almost the last words of our Lord Jesus before he was arrested and tried and crucified.

Almost his last words to his disciples were these, watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. There is an enemy.

[10 : 08] Remember Paul's words to the Ephesian church. Our warfare, our struggle, is not with flesh and blood. And that's what the devil wants us to think. He says, you know, you're a waste of space.

You're a mass of contradictions. Look at you. You're not worth the space you occupy. And we say, well, well, yeah, well, yes, that's true.

And Paul says, our warfare is not with flesh and blood. And sometimes we think, well, I know it's not really with myself, it's with these other people. your warfare is not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers.

Now, Paul is not saying that indwelling sin isn't a battle that we have to confront and in the power of God overcome.

And he's not saying that there aren't people who can be troublesome and difficult. But he's saying that ultimately behind everything else, there is an enemy, principalities and powers.

[11 : 16] He speaks about the wiles, the stratagems, literally in the Greek word, the methodia, the methods. Satan has method in his madness. He knows your frame.

He understands your psychology. And he will frame his temptations to suit and to fit your psychology. And here, right in Genesis 3, the Lord is saying, you have an enemy.

I'm going to address him. He will not have the last word. He will not have the ultimate triumph. And so right in the immediate aftermath of the fall of humanity into sin and rebellion against its creator, the Lord tells this enemy of his ultimate demise.

He, singular, he, the offspring of the woman, when he comes, he will crush your head. You think you have won the victory?

You will be crushed by the man from the seed of the woman. And just as Satan overcame God's man in a lavish garden, so God's better man would overcome Satan first in a wilderness.

[12:47] Remember, at the outset of Jesus' public ministry, Satan comes in his weakness, in the frailty of our Savior's humanity, and on three occasions presses him with temptations.

And eventually Jesus says, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And he vanquishes Satan.

But then ultimately on the cross, as Satan thinks he has gained at last the triumph over God's better man, the cry rings out, Tetelestai, it is finished.

I've always found it striking that the Greek word, just take my word for it, the Greek word is not, it is finished.

It is a cry of triumph. It is finished. The victory has been won. I have completed and accomplished all that the Father has given me to do.

[13:55] I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. The Son of Man came from the seed of the woman, and he crushed the serpent's head in the very place where Satan could never, ever, ever, ever, ever have imagined he would be crushed.

As he lay, nailed to a Roman cross, the spit of his creatures dripping down his face.

There, God crushed the head of the serpent. Because there, in his death, followed by his resurrection, the seed of the woman, the offspring of the woman, triumphed, and brought forth in his triumph, a mighty exodus of men and women, boys and girls, unto salvation.

The very death that Satan thought spelled the demise of God's better man, spelled the triumph of the Son of Man, because his death was not for himself.

He was dying the death in our place and for our sake, that we could never die. Evil has its day.

[15:32] And often it seems, perhaps in our day, increasingly that evil reigns. And we think at times, is it ever going to change?

Yes. Because the offspring of the woman has crushed the head of the serpent. And one day, that will be made public to the cosmos when he returns and casts Satan and all his brood into the lake of fire that will never, ever die.

And that's why our greatest need tonight is to belong to this offspring of the woman who has crushed the serpent's head. Our greatest need is to belong to that victor.

You know, there are only two kinds of people in this world. Those who are united to the offspring of the woman and those who are united to the offspring of Satan.

Only two kinds of people in Darville, New Mills, in the Valley, Cambridge, Timbuktu, wherever you go in this world. People are either united to the victor or they belong to the defeated.

[16:54] Maybe we should ask ourselves tonight, do I belong to the offspring of the woman who has crushed the head of the serpent?

Or am I still united to the offspring of the evil one? And so God announces a word of solemn judgment, but that really isn't what I want to focus on this evening.

I want you to notice that in this text there is a word of glorious hope. hope. I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike at his heel. You see, embedded in that brief sermon is a word of hope.

God announces to the serpent that someone from the offspring of the woman will one day come and crush him.

[18:09] Satan will be defeated. And here is where we first encounter the glorious truth of the grace of God in the Bible.

Or as I would rather have it the God of grace. We speak often about grace as if it were a thing, a blessing.

And most often we understand what we're saying to one another. Grace isn't a blessing. Grace is God himself giving himself to you in kindness and love.

Jesus Christ is the grace of God. When we say we are saved by grace, what we mean is we are saved by God acting in kindness and love towards us in giving his son Jesus Christ.

Now grace is shorthand for all of that. But we mustn't depersonalize grace. Jesus Christ is the grace of God.

[19 : 16] You know that great text in 2 Corinthians 8 is it? Verse 9, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor.

Here is where we encounter the extraordinary, unimaginable, extravagant, loving kindness of Almighty God towards his rebellious creation.

He's not going to leave us under the thralldom of the devil. He's not going to leave us to live out righteously and justly the consequences of our rebellion against him in Adam, our first head.

He's going to raise up someone, he, from the offspring of the woman. Now you see, God was under no obligation to do anything for humanity.

Have you ever asked the question, why grace? why, why Lord, undeserved kindness to judgment deserving sinners?

[20 : 43] Why? Why? Why? You know the Bible's answer to that or God's answer to that.

Do you not know me? Do you not know me? Do you not know me? Do you not know me? Let me try and put it as picture fully and maybe dramatically as I can.

Exodus 33. Moses pleads with God, show me your glory. Show me your glory, he says.

And then you go into Exodus 34 and you have this dramatic picture of God, as it were, placing Moses in the cleft of the rock.

And the Lord God causes all his glory goodness to pass before Moses. And the Lord speaks. Now Moses has prayed, show me your glory.

[21 : 49] And the Lord speaks. Remember what the Lord says, Exodus 34, verse 6 is it? The Lord, the Lord. What's his first word?

You want to know my glory, Moses. You want to know what makes me me. You want to know who the great I am is. Listen to this, Moses.

The Lord, the Lord, rich in mercy and slow to anger. Not omnipotent, omniscient, everlasting, glorious, majestic, sovereign.

He could say all of those things. But he takes Moses to the heart of who he is. He says, Moses, do you want to know me?

Then you'll need to get this, rich in mercy. So when you say, Lord, why grace? I don't deserve anything from you, except your righteous wrath?

[22 : 57] Why grace? Why, oh Lord, such love to me? And the Lord says, that's because that's just who I am.

That's who I am. That's why every service of Christian worship should be the declaration of God. I don't mean that we don't go to the Bible to discover ourselves and to find encouragement.

If we read the Bible rightly, God is saying, do you not get it? I am your encouragement. Who I am is what will strengthen you, help you, sustain you, support you, enable you.

Me. The whole of the Bible, Genesis to Revelation, is about God. Behold your God.

Very first words of the Bible, in the beginning, God. These are immense words.

[24 : 10] And the whole Bible is an unpacking of that. You see, the whole Bible is really an exposition of Genesis 3.15.

Let me try and explain what I mean. God makes a promise. Someone from the seed of women, from the offspring of the women, is going to come and crush your head. Can you imagine Adam and Eve and their offspring after them remembering that promise?

Well, who is he? When is he coming? How will we know him when he comes? And so the years pass and we could pause at different points, but Noah is born.

His parents give him the name Noah, Noach. Why? It means rest. Is this the one who's going to give us rest? Who's going to defeat the enemy? No.

Not Noah. He fails. He fails badly. Or maybe Abraham, the friend of God. Is this the one who will crush the serpent's head?

[25 : 18] No, not Abraham. And you could go on throughout the Bible and David, the man after God's own heart, is he the one?

Is he the one we're waiting for? Is he the offspring of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent? Not David. Adulterer and murderer, restored.

Restored. But that's what he was. So God's people would have been waiting and wondering, well, who is he?

And very slowly, if you read the Bible carefully, you have this developing picture, although there was a time, I can remember it, people in my vintage can remember it, where you took the film of

your brownie 128 to the chemist, and you would get it developed, and if you were able to see what was going on, you'd put it in a solution, and slowly but surely you would see the photographs beginning to take shape, and the Bible's like that, so you read through the Bible and you discover, for example, Genesis 49, that the promised one will be from the tribe of Judah.

Judah. Oh, well, okay, that's one tribe out of twelve, tribe of Judah. And then as the unfolding picture develops, you discover unfathomably in the seventh chapter of Isaiah, he will be born of a virgin, born of a virgin.

[26 : 51] Virgins don't give birth. You know, they may have been primitive, but they weren't stupid. They understood biology, but the virgin will conceive. Can you imagine God's people thinking the virgin will conceive?

Virgins don't conceive. So what's this to do with someone from the tribe of Judah? The virgin will conceive. And then you go on to the prophecy of Micah, Bethlehem, Bethlehem, you who are least amongst the clans of Judah, from you will come forth one whose origins are from everlasting. And you're thinking, whoa, wait, wait a minute. He's from the tribe of Judah. He's going to be conceived in the womb of a virgin. His origins are going to be from everlasting, and yet he's going to be identified with Bethlehem.

And you come to Isaiah 9. And by this time your head is reeling, you discover that he is to be called mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace, mighty God.

Mighty God? How can God come into this fallen, broken world? And slowly but surely, and then you come to the climax of it and the servant songs in Isaiah, the four servant songs, Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 53, and in 53, Isaiah 53, you have this astonishing statement.

[28 : 22] He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Can you imagine God's people trying to put this all together? By his wounds we are healed? Yes, because he's going to crush the serpent's head by his wounds.

the very wounds that Satan would think would be the demise of the offspring of the woman would be the very price of our redemption.

God makes a promise. He's not bound to make a promise.

There wasn't anything in us that would cause God to say, well, you know, they're somewhat deserving. God was not compelled to be to us the God of grace.

[29 : 33] God but that's who he is. That's who he is. I've often wondered what's the first thing people should be saying about their pastors and elders?

You know, do you know our minister? Yeah. What do you think of him? I wonder if the first response, believer or unbeliever is, you know, he's a man of grace.

if in some measure, if in some small measure that cannot be said of us, we shouldn't be in the ministry, we shouldn't be elders.

Because the great prototypical minister of the people of God, the great shepherd himself, was full of grace. you know, when we examine young men in our presbytery in England for the ministry, you know, when I was much younger, and some of you will know this only too well, I'd be wanting to ask them, tell me what you think about John Owen and the opera ad extra trinitatis in divisa sunt.

And they sort of look at me. And I say, you don't know about that. But more and more I want to say to them, tell me about your love for your wife.

[31 : 11] Tell me how you view other people. Tell me about your desire to help with kindness and generosity and self-sacrificing zeal the needs of others.

Now, I still want to ask about John Owen and the opera ad extra trinitatis. But I really want to say, because I'm really saying it to myself, to my shame, is there anything about Jesus in you that should make us want to set you apart as a minister of the gospel?

There are only two kinds of people in the world, as I said. And the seed of the woman, the offspring of the woman, and the offspring of the serpent, the believing and the unbelieving, the forgiven and the unforgiven, the heaven-bound and the hell-bound.

And maybe I don't know some of you very well. Maybe you're thinking, well, how do I get from the offspring of Satan into the family and the offspring of God?

There's a wonderful verse in John's gospel, chapter 1, as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become the children of God.

[32 : 47] God is always holding out his hands all the day long. Maybe you're thinking tonight, well, Ian, I don't have the energy to run to him.

Well, that's okay. Just receive. And maybe you're thinking, well, I don't even know if I've got the energy to hold out my hands and receive what he's offering.

Well, that's okay. Just fall upon him. Just collapse yourself upon him.

He turns no one away who comes to him by Jesus Christ. You may be here tonight bruised and broken, but I want to leave you with this one last word.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, if you belong to the offspring of the one who has crushed the head of the serpent, you're the most envied being in the cosmos.

[34 : 07] these valley towns will walk past you not giving you a second glance, but the whole of heaven's glory looks at you with envy and wonder.

You belong to God. You belong to the destroyer and the crusher of the serpent. you have God as your God.

If I were to ask you the question, what's the great thematic pulse beat of the whole Bible? I'm sure we would get different answers.

But there is one foundational principle, pulse beat. You find it in Genesis, you find it in Leviticus 11, all the way through till you find it in Revelation 22.

I will be your God and you will be my people. So if someone says to you tomorrow at work or a neighbor, what were you up to yesterday?

[35 : 31] well, I was listening to a man who told me I was the most envied being in the cosmos.

Now, one might get round that you had lost the plot or they might just say to you, what on earth does that mean?

and you could say, let's sit down and I'll tell you all about it. May the Lord bless to us his word. we two there and I'll