

TheForum – Straight answers to straight questions

What's wrong with the world today?

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[0 : 00] Okay, what I want to start by doing, okay, I need everybody, everybody to close your eyes, close your eyes, okay, everyone, I want you to picture, I want you to picture the perfect world.

Everybody, even you ladies at the back, close your eyes, picture the perfect world. What does the perfect world look like? What is it? What are the sights? What are the sounds?

What are the smells? How do you treat each other in a perfect world? How do you want to be treated in a perfect world?

How are you in a perfect world? What are you like? Okay, now I want you to picture, let's say London, picture the very worst part of London that you can imagine.

Okay? The very worst part of London you can possibly imagine. And again, what does it look like? What does it smell like? How are people treating each other in the very worst part of London that you can imagine?

[1 : 25] Now, what has got to change between that worst thing you've imagined and the perfect world? What are the things that have got to change between that? Okay, you can open your eyes again now.

Now, today we're looking, we're answering the question, what is wrong with the world today? Now, there are some people, I've got a friend at the church that I go to.

I think she'd call herself a Christian. She's got two young children. I think, though, as soon as you start talking to her about things like what is wrong with the world today, she'll start thinking that you're wagging the finger at her.

You'll think, that's Christian. You'll think, that's Christianity. It's judgmental. It's wagging your finger at what is wrong in people. Or I've got another friend, his name's Andrew.

We went to school together. In fact, I was out for dinner with him on Friday night. And he doesn't believe in God. And he'd say things like, Matt, for goodness sake, why do you have to focus on the negative things?

[2 : 34] Why so much negativity in Christianity? Sure, okay, nothing's perfect. I'm not perfect. But why the negativity? Why don't you focus on the positive things?

Why don't you encourage people in what they're good at, rather than focusing on negative things? And then I think of myself, actually, when we come to a question like this.

I've been a Christian, I don't know, 10, 11, 12 years now. And to be honest, you know, I kind of know the theological answers to the question, what's wrong with the world today?

But it just takes so much emotional capital, so much emotional effort to come face to face with what is wrong with the world today.

It's just, quite frankly, too much. It's more than I want to bother with on the afternoon of the Wimbledon finals. I don't really want to.

[3 : 38] On a sunny day like this, I don't want to have to think about what is wrong with the world. Really, what I'm concerned with, even though I've been a Christian for 10 years, even though, God willing, I'll be a vicar in a few years' time.

Actually, the things I care about are how my relationship with my girlfriend is going. How, when I was working, how my job was going.

Now how my studies are going. I'm concerned with how to have a laugh on a Friday night, or to spend a relaxing day in the park on a Saturday afternoon. Those are the things that I'm concerned with.

And quite frankly, to spend an hour together like this, answering the question, what is wrong with the world? I'm very aware that wherever you're coming from, I'm on the back foot.

And so what I want to do, I've been thinking about this, I want to try and convince us all that it is worth thinking about that question.

[4 : 41] What is wrong with the world today? And I thought, I was thinking to myself, how best to put it? And I came up with this analogy. I mean, all analogies fall short.

I think this one probably in particular, because the danger is it trivialises what we're talking about. But I'll give it to you anyway. It's really important to know what is wrong with the world, so that you'll yearn for God to fix it.

It's a bit like, you know when you move into a new house? You know you move into a new house, and isn't there about a period, about a week, where you see what is wrong with your new room or your new house so clearly?

You go, ah, that wall needs a painting. Or there's a splodge on the carpet there. Or that room's just arranged really badly. If only I could just shift the sofa around, then I'd get a bit more room.

And you've got about a week where that is all there. And you see it, you see it, you see it. And it glares you in the face. But I reckon after a week, you just get used to it, don't you?

[5 : 47] You get used to it, and that impetus to do something about it, the impetus to get the painters in, the impetus to get the husband to put the shelves up, that goes because you just get used to it.

And we're going to be looking at a passage, Genesis 3, this afternoon. It's a passage where, basically, on one page of the Bible, give or take, it tells you everything that is wrong with the world. It's a passage we've read before, I'm sure, most of us. But the thing is, the reason why we're looking at it is because I don't want us to be like someone who's been in a room for more than a week, who no longer sees what's wrong with it.

I believe that this afternoon, the reason why we'll look at this question is because God wants us to show us what is wrong with the world, so that we'll yearn for him to fix it.

God wants us to see it. He wants us to look around and be able to see what is wrong with the world, so that we'll yearn for him to fix it. Okay, that's where we're going today.

[6 : 59] I'm going to hand over to your table leaders now. The way it's going to work is you're going to look at passages from Genesis 3, get into the text, answer the questions, and then I'll step back up in about another 10 minutes or so.

Over to table leaders. This, this is a picture of the way things are meant to be.

Can you guys, can you see that at the back there? That's God ruling everything, loving people, humanity loving God back, obeying God out of joyful obedience, and other humans loving one another.

That is the way things are meant to be. But did you, I hope you picked up in your Bible studies the temptation that the serpent is putting to humanity. The serpent's saying, get rid of God, that's what you've got to do.

Get rid of God, then you'll be really happy. God's only a spoil sport anyway. Get rid of God, and then you'll be happy.

[8 : 06] Satan is tempting humanity saying, you don't need God. You don't have to obey him. You can make him small and get rid of him.

And then we get to, we get to verse 6, which really is the, in a way, the lowest point of it. Verse 6, Does anyone know what the date is today?

4th of July. What's special about the 4th of July? American Independence Day. This is Independence from God Day. This is Eve and Adam in verse 6 saying, No, do you know what? I'm not going to listen to God. God made me. God loves me. God sustains me. But I'm going to make God so small that I can just throw him away and not care.

I'm going to be arrogant, and I'm going to stand over God and think that I know better. When she saw it was good for food and it was a delight to the eyes.

[9 : 21] It is humanity doing what it wants with no reference to God. That is what is wrong with the world today. Humanity doing what it wants with no reference to God.

And do you want to know what that looks like? It looks like this. It's humanity making love to itself. That is what happens when you get rid of God. Humanity making love to itself. Curved in on itself. Not loving God, not loving anything else. Humanity turned in on itself.

Can everyone see that picture? You guys are your backs to me. I know you can't. Well done. And I wonder if we could ask ourselves, where do we see the fruit of humanity turned in on itself today? I was reading Time magazine this week, and I found this fascinating quote from the guy who co-founded the magazine. A guy called Henry Luce.

[10:33] And he said, I became a journalist to come as close as possible to the heart of the world. And I wonder what that looks like.

I wonder what the heart of humanity making love to itself looks like. And where you look through the magazine, and it doesn't look too great, to be honest.

Because once you get through all the adverts for how to make your life perfect, if only you had the right watch, you get to something a little bit less savoury.

So you look down and you see the results of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. You see corruption in Afghanistan. You see a brutal drugs gang in Mexico terrorising the community.

There was one time when they killed some police officers and rolled the decapitated heads onto a dance floor to make a point. You see, Uganda, the most malarious place on earth, and traditional funding failing.

[11:36] That is what humanity looks like when it turns in on itself, when it gets rid of God, when it makes love to itself. But in a way, from the sublime to the ridiculous, I was doing some research for this talk online.

I promise you, this is research. Do you guys know Holly Willoughby? GMTV presenter. You can go onto the Now magazine website and read that she burnt her bum sunbathing, and so it's painful for her to sit down.

And I'm just thinking, like, we get used to that kind of rubbish. We get used to be able to go to the magazine shelf in a railway station.

I was in Oxford a few weeks ago. And see a magazine called Celebrity Diet. I mean, the point is, we just accept it, don't we? We accept it as if that is normal.

It isn't normal. It shouldn't be that way. It shouldn't be the case that poor people in Uganda die of malaria. We shouldn't get used to that.

[12:48] It shouldn't be the case that you can go and just look at absolute crap on magazine stands. It isn't the way it is meant to be. That is humanity curved in on itself.

It's humanity making love to itself. And God loves you too much to let you just look at it and think that is normal. You are not, we are not to look at it and think that it is normal.

And, you know, we are all guilty of it. It is easy to point at, you know, Now magazine and that kind of thing. I am guilty of it.

We curve in on ourselves. Men, I wonder how many of your wives have spent more money on haircuts this year than your whole family has given to help the poor or persecuted Christians.

Our tendency is to turn in on ourselves. I read this quote from C.S. Lewis.

[13:55] He said it's from Mere Christianity. He said this year or this month or more likely today we have failed to practice ourselves the kind of behaviour we expect from other people.

I know that's true of me. And God doesn't want you to go through life and miss that humanity, even our own hearts, are not what they should be.

You see, they need fixing. Something is wrong. And so I wonder, I wonder how God's going to respond to a humanity turned in on itself.

We'll pick up the story at verse 7. Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

[15:11] Would he say distance between man and God now that man has got rid of God? Verse 9. He said, Now I'll leave it over to you guys to read the rest of the passage, in fact, up to the end of chapter 3.

And if you can get through those questions on your sheet, that would be great. So humanity makes love to itself.

And as a result, as a punishment, God curses the world. And I hope you've got a chance to see the areas in which that happens. And so in the beginning, the world is perfect and everything is as it's meant to be.

And God says to Adam and Eve, go forth and multiply. But here we see childbearing being cursed so that it's painful.

And in the beginning, God says to Adam and Eve, when Adam sees Eve for the first time, he's overjoyed. And he says, at last, this is flesh of my flesh.

[17:03] The joy of a man and woman coming together. But I know, obviously, anyone who's married will tell you that while marriage is still a great gift, things are not always perfect in marriage.

And in the beginning, God says, here is the earth, go and subdue it. In a sense, have fun with it. The earth is going to be a joy for you to subdue.

But now here we have seen with pain you'll bring forth food. With toil, with sweat, with thorns. It is not meant to be like this.

And even in this chapter, we've seen God walking in the cool of the evening with Adam and Eve. But how does the chapter end? Did you get there?

With Adam and Eve being banished from God's presence in Eden. What was meant to be perfect? What was meant to be perfect?

[18:09] Now looks like this. A semblance of what it should be, but junked up. Warped. You know like if you've got a hot frying pan or a hot pan, and you put it on your work surface.

And it just, it was a thing my mum told me I must never do. You put it on your work surface, and it just, it just warps it. And there's nothing you can do to put it right. Well that is what Genesis 3 is saying about the world today.

Somehow, somewhere, right at the very fabric of our world, it is warped. It isn't right. And you and I can't put that right.

And I think Genesis 3 is in the Bible, no matter what you think of talking serpents or Adam and Eve, or how it came to be here. One of the reasons it is in the Bible is so that our eyes will be opened, so that we would not become accustomed to this warped world.

So that we would see that things aren't how they should be. And I believe God wants us to see that. You know, when things are difficult with your husband or wife, it's not meant to be like that.

[19:24] You're meant to think Genesis 3, this world is not as it should be. Do you ask yourself, why is it when the alarm goes off tomorrow morning at 6.30, and you lie there feeling like you've been hit by a train, and there's no power on earth that's going to be able to haul you out of bed?

Why is that? It's Genesis 3. It's because God has cursed work. It's because with pain and thorns, we will bring forth things from the earth all the days of our life.

And God wants you to remember that when the alarm goes off tomorrow morning. And then tomorrow, when the photocopier jams, ten minutes before you need something for that meeting, I want you to think Genesis 3, this is God showing you that the world isn't the way it should be.

And that restless dis-ease that so many of us feel, even if we're Christians, that we see around us in art and society and alienation and anxiety being alienated from a Father who loves us.

God wants you to see what is wrong with the world. And I've been asking myself, I was asking myself, preparing this passage, why is this in the Bible?

[20:42] And I think it is this. You're meant to read Genesis 3 and be sad at the end of it. You're meant to think, this is not how it should be. I am gutted that the world is like this.

I'm gutted that when we could have lived in perfect relationship with God and each other, we chose to turn our hearts in on ourselves and for humanity to make loves to itself.

You're meant to be gutted that relationships are difficult, that work is difficult, that even raising children is difficult. That is why this is here.

And here is the thing, it's what I've been saying all along. God loves you too much to let you get used to what is wrong in the world. That doesn't mean don't enjoy the good things, but it means don't get used to this warped world.

Because if there is something better, then I don't want to miss that. If there is something better, then God doesn't want you to miss that.

[21:58] And if God himself came to us 2,000 years ago and told us rumours of a better world to come, told us rumours of a place where there will be no more cancer, where children won't die, where my heart that is so selfish and so still, even as a Christian, sinful, where my heart will be opened out to love God and to love you as I should do.

If there is a place like that that is hinted at in the movies I watch, is hinted at in the books I read, that is hinted at in the plays I watch, if there is a place and God himself came and told me rumours of

that place, I do not want to miss getting to that place because I've become too accustomed to this world.

And God doesn't want you to miss that place either. That is why Genesis 3 is here. That is why it's been worth spending this afternoon reading it.

So I think to myself, how can I use this knowledge? And I've, this week, I've been thinking, when things are not perfect, when I have an argument with my girlfriend or whatever, there's two ways to respond to that, isn't there?

You can just go, well, you can either get really down about it and obviously sometimes things are very sad. Or you can just say, oh, that's just the way it's meant to be, c'est la vie.

[23 : 38] Or you can use it, even the small things, to remind you that there is a better world coming. To remind you that Jesus said, behold, I am making all things new and I go to prepare a place for you and all you need do to get to that perfect world is put your trust in me.

that's how I'm trying to respond to the effects of this warped world and my own turned in heart having studied this passage.

And just close your eyes one more time. Just close your eyes. Now, picture that perfect place that you pictured at the start.

Again, what does it sound like? What does it smell like? How do people treat each other? Where's God? What are you like? Now, God is saying that before that place becomes a reality, humanity that makes love to itself needs to have its heart changed.

This world that is warped at the very fabric needs to be put right. And C.S. Lewis says this, At present, we are on the outside of that world, the wrong side of the door.

[25 : 08] We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so.

someday, by the grace of God, we shall get in. And I think the question that Jesus has for us today is, will you allow him to lead you to that perfect world?

over to you guys for the last time.