

Had a Great Fall

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[0 : 00] Well, this sermon is part of a series on the opening chapters of the Bible from the book of Genesis. In case you're wondering why we end up here with the story of a serpent in a garden.

Well, let's pray. God, we pray that you will help us to understand your word, that we may be followers all the better for it, of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. I had it tough as a child. I had it tough because I've got two younger sisters. And it meant that whenever we fought, I was the one who got into trouble.

Now, if you're an older brother and you've got younger sisters, you'll know exactly what I mean. It doesn't matter whose fault it was or what fight it was or what it was about, I was the one who got into trouble.

It was always me. And it would always be one of my sisters, or both of them if I was lucky, crying to my mother saying, Paul's done this or he's taken this or he's broken this or he's hit us or something.

[1 : 06] Now, of course, as you will well understand knowing me as your vicar very well, I was purely innocent all the time. Well, hardly ever of the time, actually. My standard response to my mother's interrogation, indeed not really interrogation, just accusation, was, what have you done?

Go to your room. You won't have any dessert or you won't be able to play with your toys or do this or do that. And I'd always respond by saying, she did it or she made me do it or it's her fault or something like that.

That is, I was wanting to pass the blame to one of my sisters. Occasionally I'd be creative and find somebody else to pass the blame to, but there wasn't usually anybody else around.

The point is that I'm no different to anybody else. All of us are people who like to pass the blame. It doesn't matter what we do or how guilty we are, we like to find somebody else or something else to blame for our mistakes.

So we blame our sisters or we blame our brothers or often we blame our parents. Oh, our parents have made me do this. Or sometimes if we're parents, we blame our kids.

[2 : 19] It's the kids' fault that I've got angry with my husband or my wife today or something else like that. Sometimes we get more creative and we blame the teachers at school or the others at school or the students at school or sometimes just the school itself.

Sometimes we perhaps come a little bit closer to the truth, but we blame some aspect about ourselves as if it's out there. It's not my fault I was too tired.

Or it's not my fault I was hungry. Or it's not my fault my hormones were playing up. Or it's not my fault I was just bored and I had to do something. Maybe we say it's not my fault it's just human nature.

Sometimes that in effect means we're blaming God. Sometimes people put it in a sense that the devil made me do it. Sometimes people blame the government.

It's interesting how often the government gets blamed for our own mistakes. It's the government's fault that I didn't get taught properly or brought up properly or get this job or that job or this house or that house or this car or something like that.

[3 : 24] All of us do it all the time. We pass the blame to other people for our mistakes. It's very common. And I'm sure we all do it. Even though there are probably times when we do accept the blame for something we do wrong.

Well let me assure you it's always been that way with humanity. Adam and Eve, the first two people ever, according to the Bible, they did exactly the same thing. For their mistakes, they passed the blame to others.

Let's remember what's going on in the story of Adam and Eve and what mistakes they made and to whom they blamed those mistakes. The serpent, we're told, was more crafty than any other animal

that God had made.

Clearly the serpent is something that God has made. Genesis makes it clear that the serpent hasn't just arrived from out of space, out of God's domain, but is something that God himself has made. We should also try and put aside for a minute thinking that the serpent is necessarily evil or bad. Eve, when she spoke to the serpent, obviously didn't think it's strange the serpent spoke and obviously didn't think the serpent was inherently evil or nasty.

[4 : 32] After all, she didn't have the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible that tells us the serpent is Satan. It seems to us as we read this story that Eve thought that the serpent was fairly harmless or innocent when he approached her and asked her a question.

The serpent approaches Eve and asks her, did God say, you shall not eat from any tree in the garden? Harmless question?

A question of curiosity perhaps? Maybe it's somebody beginning a theological course wanting to find out about God. Did God say this?

And Eve, one might suspect very naturally, responds and engages with the question that the serpent has asked. And so she replies to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it or you shall die.

Now we need to note the subtlety in the words here because it's very important to understand what's going on. The serpent's question sows seeds of doubt.

[5 : 50] Literally the serpent's question is, in verse one, did God really say, you shall not eat from any tree in the garden? Now God didn't say that.

The serpent's got it wrong. But the way he frames the question, did God really say that, casts a doubt or a cloud over the character of God. Eve responds.

But just like the serpent has misquoted God, Eve's response miscorrects the serpent's interpretation of God.

So Eve says, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but that's not quite what God said. Maybe you think I'm being pedantic here, but God has said we may freely eat of the trees of the garden.

It seems Eve is just narrowing the generosity of God when he said you may freely eat of these trees in the garden. And then she goes on to say, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden.

[7 : 01] Well that's almost true. But there were two trees in the middle of the garden, there was only one which was prohibited. But the way Eve has framed her response heightens the prohibition rather than the abundance and generosity that God had allowed in all the other trees.

But then she also went on to say, nor shall you touch it. But God had never said that. Eve has got God wrong. It seems that she's thinking that God's a little bit more stingy than we saw that he was last week.

And then she says at the end of verse 3, the last thing, or you shall die. Literally she says, God said, you're not allowed to eat it or touch it lest you die. That is, in case you die.

Now God hadn't said that. God had said, if you eat of it, you shall surely die. But he says, God said, if you eat of it, well you might die.

It weakens what God has said. Now you may think, oh I'm being a bit pedantic here. Is Eve really that bad? But what's going on here is a little train, a progression if you like.

[8 : 15] The serpent sows seeds of doubt about what God had said. And Eve responds, but she maybe unwittingly, maybe deliberately, actually casts the wrong shape to the words that God had literally said in the preceding chapter.

The thing is that Eve's words suggest that God is a bit more stingy than he is. A bit more nasty, or a bit more, don't do this, you are not allowed this.

But if you were here last week, you remember from Genesis 2 that God is not like that. God is abundant in his provisions. The one tree that he prohibited was hardly being stingy. Well it's a whole forest of wealth of trees that are good to eat and good to look at.

Well then the serpent comes back and responds, but this time the serpent takes another step in the progression. First he just asked a question but shaped the question to sow seeds of doubt.

But now he makes a statement for the first time. So the serpent said to the woman, verse 4, you will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God

knowing good and evil.

[9 : 29] The last bit of that's true. For eating the tree, the prohibited fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, yes that would be what happened to those who ate of that tree. But the beginning of the serpent's statement is an outright denial of what God had said in the preceding chapter.

Back in chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, God had said, you may freely eat of every tree but in the middle of the garden there are two trees and this one you're not allowed to eat and if you eat of it you shall surely die.

You will not die, said the serpent. And there comes the dilemma for Eve, the woman in the garden. Whom do you believe?

God? If you eat of it you shall surely die. Or the serpent? You will not die. Who would you want to believe if you had that choice facing you?

Well you'd want to believe the serpent, wouldn't you? Because it's more comfortable, more liberating, less bounds, less prohibitive. And that's in the end what of course Eve does.

[10 : 35] The issue you see for Eve is which statement to trust. Which person to trust. God? You will die if you eat that tree. Or the serpent?

No, you won't die. The serpent doesn't say to her go and eat it. He doesn't even hold out a branch to her. All he says is you will not die if you eat the fruit of that tree.

The issue of course is that God's not being stingy, he's generous. There are lots of trees he's allowed the people, Adam and Eve, to eat. Only one that he's prohibited.

And yet despite that one single, almost trivial prohibition, Eve chooses to trust the serpent's words. And so we read that she looked, she saw the tree was good for food, she saw that it was a delight to the eyes, pleasant to look at, something that she lusted after or coveted is the idea.

And she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband and he ate. Very simply said. But as one commentator says, so simply act, so hard the undoing.

[11 : 56] There's a pattern there about sin as well. Runs through the Bible. See something, look screwed, covet it, lust after it, take it and do it. It happened when a man under Joshua had entered the promised land.

He saw some of the spoil, the riches of the Canaanites who were living in the land. He saw it, he looked at it, he lusted after it and he took it. And God judged him and put him to death for that. King David, the same sort of thing. Out on his roof, the sun was there, he looked down and there's a naked woman sun basking on the roof of her house down below. He looked, he saw, he lusted, he coveted and he took.

And God judged him for that too. But what is it that they ate? Traditionally, we know that Adam and Eve ate an apple.

But of course, they probably didn't eat an apple. It's just a sort of myth because in Latin, the word for apple and the word for evil are similar, not related, but similar, malum and malus.

[13 : 02] I suppose in our modern times, to eat of an apple would be something like this. Oh, the serpent left that here. I believe he called it an apple. What Adam and Eve are doing, of course, is not so much eating a bad fruit, but rather what they're doing is exercising independence of God.

They're asserting their own autonomy. They're asserting their own individuality apart from God. God. They're denying God in the end. And they're saying, we can make the decisions.

We can decide what is right or wrong. God, you said this is right, but this tree is wrong, but we decide otherwise. We're playing God here, and we decide that every tree is all right.

that's what's wrong with their sin. That's what's wrong with Adam and Eve, and we saw indeed a hint of that last week with the idea of this tree called the knowledge of good and evil.

You see, sin's like that. Sin is saying that I decide what is right or wrong. I do what I want to do. I please myself. I satisfy my desires in my way, and so on.

[14 : 19] Well, the consequences of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil are the most serious consequences of all. You might think sometimes that you eat some food that's bad and you get a little bit of food poisoning and you feel off for a couple of days.

Well, this universe has been suffering ever since that apple or whatever it was was eaten, however many thousands or millions of years ago. What are the consequences of that little act of eating that's described so simply here?

Well, firstly, as they ate, there was an inherent guilt about it. There was something within them that made them realize that something was wrong. They didn't need God to tell them that they'd done

something wrong.

They felt it. So the very next verse, having eaten, we read that then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

The end of the preceding chapter, just the verse before this story began, we're told that they were naked and unashamed and now, having eaten the fruit without anybody to tell them anything else, as a result, inside them, they knew that something was wrong and they wanted to cover themselves up.

[15 : 35] In a sense, it's a paradigm or a model for us as well sometimes, our feelings of guilt. We want to somehow cover ourselves up and hide away.

And that's the second part of the consequence. The garden in which Adam and Eve lived was a garden where God dwelt. And we saw last week a hint of that intimacy between God and his creation dwelling harmoniously in that garden.

But now, having eaten of the fruit, what do we find from verse 8 onwards? They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze. Nice time to go for a walk. Maybe God every day went for a walk in the garden and maybe every day he would come to Adam and Eve and had a little chat with them about what sort of day they'd each had. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of God among the trees of the garden.

First time they'd ever done that. They're not playing hide and seek, let me tell you that. It's not a game. They're scared of God. That's why they're hiding. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you?

[16 : 48] As if God needed to know. As if God was ignorant of where they were. God knew, but he approaches with a question, not an accusation.

And the man said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself. Fear.

He didn't need God to tell him he'd done something. Later on, at the end of this chapter, God expels them from his presence. He kicks them out of the garden of Eden and he puts up cherubim with flaming swords to guard the way so they never come back in again.

But in one sense, God didn't even need to do that because in a sense, Adam and Eve's own failure told them within themselves that they and God were not getting on well.

They were hiding from God. They almost didn't need God to kick them out. They were wanting to flee from God in the first place. The relationship of intimacy between humanity and God is broken.

[17 : 57] Not just by God's punishment, but by the human act itself. But notice also that it's God who comes to them. It's not God like a giant foot is in Monty Python coming down to squash them and obliterate them in a fierce act of judgment.

But God walking through the garden gently asking a question. Where are you? It's God coming to seek out the sinner, the person who's failed.

It's a picture of what God is like from beginning to end of the Bible as well. One of the summaries of what Jesus came to do in this world was to seek and to save the lost. But here's the earliest picture of that.

God seeking out the sinner. And notice his first words are a question, not an accusation. He asks, where are you? He gives Adam an opportunity to respond.

Then he goes on with another question. Adam says, I heard the sound of you in the garden. I was afraid and I hid and so on. And then God doesn't accuse him yet. But rather says, who told you that you were naked?

[19 : 04] Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? Of course he has and God knows he has. But God asks a question. It gives Adam every opportunity to repent.

Every opportunity to say, God, I've done wrong. I've disobeyed what you said. Please forgive me. But none of that. Adam refuses to take the opportunity that the question allows.

God's like that when we fail. He comes to us almost graciously seeking to give us an opportunity to turn to him and say, God, I've sinned.

I've done wrong. Please accept me. God, walking through the garden, searching out Adam and Eve also reminds us that there's no escape from God either.

We can't hide from God. Adam and Eve were on a futile mission when they thought they could hide from God in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the psalmist, indeed the psalm that one of the songs we

sang was based on, tells us that there's nowhere in this universe we can hide from God where he cannot be and find us.

[20 : 16] The next thing as a consequence of what Adam and Eve have done is that they, like me as a child and like me as an adult and like you all, no doubt, refuse to take the blame.

So have you eaten of the tree? The man doesn't say yes or no. He immediately wants to shift the blame. So what does he say in verse 12? The man said, the woman you gave me.

That is, the woman, her fault, but you gave it to me so it's also your fault, God. The woman you gave me to be with me, she gave me fruit and I ate.

Passing the blame. So God turns to the woman, okay woman, well what's your story? What is it you've done? Well the woman can't just pass the blame back to Adam so she says, it's the serpent, he tricked me and I ate.

You probably know the old joke, Adam blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. So God addresses the serpent.

[21 : 22] He doesn't ask him a question, the serpent has no response. One of the consequences of what Adam and Eve have done is now seen in the judgment that God brings. But in a sense it's a judgment that's already there because already in the sin itself, in the failure itself, is the distortion or the fracture of the harmonious relationships that God had made in his creation.

If you can picture the creation as like a triangle, God, humanity and the world, at the beginning it's all in harmony. But the sin itself, not God's judgment, but the sin itself fractures the relationships between each of those three.

God and humans, they're fleeing from God. The humans and the world, the relationship's already broken in a sense. And the same between God and the world and now it becomes just explicit, more clear and perhaps stronger in the words that now God gives firstly to the serpent, then to the woman and then to the man in verses 14 and onwards.

To a serpent, he says, because you've done this, you are cursed among all animals, you'll crawl on your belly. Maybe it suggests that the serpent had legs before this, but maybe it doesn't imply that. But certainly it's saying that a serpent crawling on its belly is a sign of its judgment from God for its trickery and deceit in enticing Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit.

And dust you shall eat all the days of your life. More than that, he says, I'll put enmity between the serpent and humanity. For the rest of our lives together, there'll be enmity between the two.

[22 : 53] And for most of us, it's true. We see a snake, we run. We don't go up and cuddle it as though it was a little kitten. The same sort of thing, you see, there's an enmity between the two running through history.

Then to the woman, he said, Two fundamental things about the woman that were seen in the previous two chapters when everything's good, now being distorted, frustrated, and made painful. One of the things about humanity when God made them was to go forth and multiply and fill the earth. And now there's still to do that, but to do it in pain and trouble. And the other thing about man and woman was that they were to be one flesh, united in marriage as we saw last week.

Yes, that's still to be the case, but the relationship will be estranged and fractured and difficult. Your desire will be for him, but he will want to rule over you. And isn't that true through world history as well?

And then to the man, he says, Because you've listened to the voice of your wife, and we ought not to take that as instruction that we never listen to our wives, don't read it out of context, and of eating of the tree about which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

[24 : 09] Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you are taken.

You are dust, and to dust you will return. Man's main job given to him by God in the preceding two chapters was to till the ground and look after it. The same job is there, but now it's to become laborious, toilsome, and full of sweat and strife.

And as well as that, there is this fractured relationship between the man and the soil, the ground, the earth. You see how catastrophic disobeying that one little thing of God was.

The relationship between God and humanity is broken, within humanity is broken, between humanity and the world is broken. the relationships breaking down at every point because of disobedience of God.

The end of the chapter, Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden so that they cannot eat of the tree of life and live forever. We may think that's God's judgment, but in part it's also his grace because it's saying I'm not going to let you live like this forever.

[25 : 25] Death is the punishment, not instantly, but eventually. and I'm not going to let you live as sinners estranged from me forever. And in a sense that's a statement of God's grace because he's going to stop the current state of affairs and eventually correct it.

The expulsion from the garden is also to remind us that sin cuts us off from God as if we need reminding because when we sin we know it. Well, let me conclude with four points.

Firstly, this passage is in part about taking the blame for our sin. And where this passage is alluded to a few times elsewhere in the Bible it has the same sort of function in part.

That we, you and I today are responsible for our own sins. It's not our parents' fault, it's not Adam's fault, it's not human nature's fault or the sinful nature's fault, it's not God's fault, the devil's fault, the government's fault, the teacher's fault, the kid's fault, the parents' fault, the brother's or the sister's fault or our neighbor's fault or our cat's or our dog's or the minister's fault or anybody else's fault. It's mine and yours alone. And unless we're prepared to take the blame for what we do wrong we will never be forgiven by God.

[26 : 44] We cannot approach God and say, God, somebody else has made me do something wrong. But God, I've done wrong. Forgive me.

Unless we take the blame for our own errors we will never ever receive the forgiveness of God.

Secondly, this passage ought to remind us that temptation is not sin.

Yes, the serpent tempted Eve and then Adam in the garden. But the temptation itself was not sin.

Sin is responding to the temptation, yielding to the temptation, doing what the temptation entices us to do.

But all of us are tempted and many of us are tempted without sinning. We ought to be careful in temptation, to shun it or resist it. Indeed, as the Lord's Prayer says, lead us not into temptation.

Not because temptation in itself is wrong, but because Jesus when he taught the Lord's Prayer knows how vulnerable we are in the face of temptation. The third point of conclusion is that at the heart of what sin is about is trust in God.

[28 : 05] For the real issue is not just disobeying this rule and disobeying that rule, but is whose word do we trust? God's or the tempters?

God's or the world's? Our world's is a tempting world, an alluring world. You don't have to watch much television to find that. There is temptation in every commercial break, whether it's for food or sex or pleasure or something else.

Temptation is before us in every aspect of our lives. But sin is about whose word do we trust? The tempter's word that this is the way you'll be satisfied and no other way, buy my product, this product's better, this will give you perfect happiness and satisfaction for the rest of your life?

Or the word of God that doesn't necessarily promise happiness, satisfaction, joy in every day of this life, but it promises it for eternity and that surely is far better.

it may not be immediate gratification which is what so many in our world seek, but it is eternal gratification. Whose word do we trust?

[29 : 22] God's or the tempters? If we trust God's then we say I'm going to refrain from stealing, not because I don't want that thing that I want to steal, but because I know that God will give me everything I need including in the end eternal satisfaction in Him.

And therefore I will not steal, therefore I will not covet. I'll refrain from revenge because I trust God's word that He is the judge and He will bring true justice in the end.

So I'm not going to execute revenge on the person at school who bullies me or somebody else in my life who's got it in for me, but rather I'll trust God's word that He is the perfect judge and I'll let Him bring vengeance on His day.

I'll refrain from accumulating wealth as though it's my God and my idol because I trust God when He says that He will perfectly satisfy me forever and money might satisfy me today or tomorrow but not forever.

I'm prepared to wait and trust God to fulfill His promise. You might respond by saying, well how do I get that sort of trust?

[30 : 41] How do I have such trust in God that I refrain from temptation and sin today and tomorrow and the next day? And I can give you one clear answer.

Read the Bible because it's only as we get a deeper and deeper understanding of the character of God that we will trust Him. Very few of us trust inherently somebody we meet for the first time. We're fools if we do. But very often as we get to know somebody very well we trust them more and more. And the same surely with God.

The more we get to know God His character, His reliability, His faithfulness and His power and ability then the more and more we will trust Him and trust His word.

And finally the last of the statements of conclusion is a reminder that sin cuts us off from God. Adam and Eve felt that they hid from God and then God Himself expelled them from the garden.

[31 : 48] And that's the problem that the whole Bible goes on to address. There in the very third chapter of the Bible is the dilemma that the rest of the Bible seeks to solve.

How can God and humanity get back together again? They're kicked out of the garden maybe symbolically to show the gap the gulf the chasm between God and humanity because of human sin. How can that be bridged? Every deed that mankind does fails to bridge the gap. It can't get there in the end. And the Bible shows us numerous, numerous examples of human failure to try and bridge the gap.

There is of course one solution only. Jesus Christ. The perfect person who perfectly brings together God and humanity when He died with outstretched arms on the cross.

For He alone took our sin away and brought us access to the Heavenly Father. He's the answer to the problem of Genesis 3. It takes a lot more pages to get to there.

[32 : 55] But be assured He is the answer and the only answer to the problem of our sin. So turn to Him. Ask for forgiveness. Accept the blame for your sin.

And know that that gulf has been bridged because God's done it for us in Christ. God's done it for us in Christ.

and know that He is the answer to the God of war. Remember God is the other and the Son who has been with us in Christ.

God's done it and our nuevos to each other together can be of list. And the others have spoken after the little and ■ after death or he has persecution