

You will not certainly die

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[0 : 00] Today's passage comes with a health warning. Being a Christian is amazing. It's the best thing. If you're not a Christian, just become a Christian. You'll be forgiven of your sins.

You'll live forever with Jesus. Just become a Christian. It's amazing. But sometimes being a Christian stings a little bit. And today will sting a little bit because we're looking at Genesis chapter 3.

So there's a health warning for you. But I want to start today on a slightly different note. Would your family and friends describe you as gullible? Would they describe you as gullible?

Would you give your details to anyone who claimed to be from the tax office? Or from Telstra? Or one of the banks? You know when they ring you up and they ask you about that?

How gullible are you? Would you fall for a con trick? My uncle, he was at the Forest Hill Chase car park recently.

[1 : 00] And he was approached by a man in a van. And the van was full of expensive designer leather jackets. And the man told my uncle this convincing story about how he has to get rid of them.

And he was willing to sell a few of them to my uncle for just a few hundred dollars. My uncle bought some. And he gave me one of the jackets. And I checked the inside tag.

And it says vinyl. But I haven't got the heart to tell him that he was conned. How could someone I'd always known to be really tight with his cash and savvy be so gullible?

We might not meet men in car parks or con men in car parks. But we do meet a lot online or via email. The most famous con, of course, is the Nigerian Prince email.

Do you know that one? The Nigerian Prince email. So here it goes. The script is always the same. You get an email from someone claiming to be a Nigerian Prince.

[2 : 01] And there's a convincing story about a fortune. Millions and millions trapped in an African bank account. But because of civil wars and the like, the Prince can't access his money.

And so if you pay a small fee and allow the money to be transferred to your account, you can have a share in the loot. There's a story that sounds true and convincing.

A huge prize on offer. You just have to pay a small fee. The script is always the same. In Genesis 3, we see a series of cons played out on two gullible victims.

And normally when people are being conned, we scratch our heads and we laugh. How could you be so gullible? But today the joke is on us. Because Adam and Eve are our representatives before God.

Today we'll see, as we see them tempted, we'll see inside our own hearts as well. Last week, God and his people living together in paradise.

[3 : 07] Surely no way to mess that up. But five small words in verse 5. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.

Just five small words. You see, no matter the temptation, whether it's Adam and Eve in a garden or in our own lives today, the central temptation, you can be like God.

Are we content to serve and follow God? Or are we gullible enough to think we can be like him? Are we content to belong to God?

Or do we need to be God? This is point one. Please keep your handouts with you. The handout will really help you today. So let me read verse 1.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God has made. Obviously, this is Satan disguised as a crafty serpent.

[4 : 11] But his first con isn't very crafty. Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? The answer, of course, no, he didn't say that.

And Eve doesn't seem to take the bait. Verse 2. 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. She answers correctly, but she answers badly. Compare what Eve said to what God actually said.

Just look over the column to 2 verse 16. 2 verse 16.

It is for their good. I have a rule with my kids. They're not allowed to cross. My kids are very, very young. They're not allowed to cross the road unless they hold my hand.

[5 : 28] A strict rule, yes. But it's so obviously one of love and protection. It's so obvious that it's there for their good. The serpent wants Eve to think that God is a strict dictator.

That he wants to limit her freedom and her fun. And even though she passes the test, she says no. She's beginning to buy into the con. Because instead of telling the serpent how amazingly kind God is and how crazy the serpent was, she says this.

God said we must not touch the tree. But God never said anything about touching the tree. You see, she's beginning to think of him as some strict rule maker.

And when we face temptation in our own lives, you know, we grit our teeth and we say no, which is correct. But is that because we believe the same thing?

That God is an angry dictator who's going to punish us as soon as we step out of line? I wonder if this con, the first one, makes sense of the social revolution of the 1960s.

[6 : 38] God just loves to limit your freedom and your fun. He's just an angry dictator. Break free. Do we forget that God's boundaries are there for our protection like a loving father?

Or do we doubt his goodness? Did God really say you can't do that? How gullible are you? Eve barely passes the first con.

So here comes Satan, the serpent, with the second one. Verse four. You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman. There are no consequences. God is a liar.

You will not certainly die. Do you know anyone who's died? And I've called this talk today, You Will Not Certainly Die, because I think this con best explains our culture at the moment.

There are no consequences. Judgment and hell. They're just mechanisms to scare you into sort of submission. Sophisticated people like us, we can see through the religious dogma.

[7 : 40] Actually, many churches in our area, in our city, have stopped believing in God's consequences of hell and judgments. They have fallen for the second oldest lie in the book.

How gullible are you? In verse five is the main con today. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

There's a nugget of truth in this con, like all cons. Sounds convincing. Over the page in verse 22, God says, the man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

You see, there's nothing special about the tree per se. It was there to underline the idea that only God gets to decide what is good from what is evil.

Being like God, that means deciding things for yourself without him. And when we face temptation in our own lives, isn't this precisely what it's like to be in our head and our hearts?

[8 : 51] To want to rule our own little patch, to decide right and wrong for ourselves? These are the three lies, the three cons in our culture.

At the moment, the script is always the same. God is too strict. There are no consequences. You will be like God. It's a con.

They're the oldest lies in the book. See, maybe we feel our temptations are unique. Maybe they feel exciting, very challenging. No one else could possibly understand.

But there's a script that's been running from the beginning. God is too strict. There are no consequences. You can be like him. You see, a con only works on the gullible, doesn't it?

The con man's strategy is to switch out the person you trust for the liar. Satan's strategy is to switch out your trust in God to belief in a lie.

[9 : 50] And as you see the script for what it is, I hope that makes you less gullible, more able to face temptation.

Everything the serpent says about God is a lie. God isn't strict. Genesis 1 and 2. He's abundant and good and kind and generous. God never lies.

Satan. He's the father of lies. And most of all, you will be like God. But we're no good at deciding right and wrong for ourselves.

As you see the script for what it is, my aim is that you will be less gullible, more able to stand in the face of temptation.

Eve isn't listening. And when it comes, it's so quick. There's no speech. Verse 6. 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.

[10:55] She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. We said in Genesis 1, the order of the universe is God and then us and then creatures underneath.

And when they try to be like him, they flip that order, that good order on its head. And so everything that comes now is an opposite to that good.

This is point 2. Verse 7. 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.

There used to be perfect intimacy in their marriage, but now they cover up and hide. There was some truth to the lie. As always, their eyes were open. They did get wisdom.

They did realize something. But all they knew was sin and shame. It's about to get worse because the boss is coming. Verse 8. 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.

[11:58] And they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, where are you? I heard you in the garden and I was afraid of you because I was naked.

So I hid. That's a terrible thing to hide from God. Much worse when you used to walk with him in the garden.

Verse 10 says they were afraid of him. They used to fear God rightly, but now they're afraid of God, which shows they have bought into the lie that he's an angry dictator out to smite them.

Notice how sin warps relationships between God and one another. Verse 12. 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. Here is the dad joke just to lighten the mood a little bit. God blames Adam.

[13:00] Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent, but he didn't have a leg to stand on. Sorry. It's a goodie, that one.

You see, they were meant to be helpers, weren't they? Husband and wife. They were meant to be helpers. But now there's blame. Actually, Adam blames God. The woman you put here with me.

Adam. Adam was created in the image of God. They both were. But Adam was meant to be ruling. But now he's shirking responsibility. While all this was going on, Adam was really busy scratching his head.

Now he's pointing the finger of blame. It's not the quality you look for in a leader. Verse 16 for Eve. To the woman, he said, I will make your pains in childbearing very severe.

With painful labor, you will give birth to children. She was made to help Adam be fruitful and multiply. Now pain in that role.

[14:02] It says, your desire will be for your husband. Which sounds like a good thing, actually. But desire here means to rule over. The next line gives it a context.

Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. You see, instead of helping her husband, the wife wants to rule over him instead.

You will not certainly die. That was the second con. But verse 19 says, you will now return to the ground. Adam came from the dust and now he will return to the dust.

He will be de-created. All of these curses are an opposite to the good order. Because they flipped it on its head and tried to be like God.

And these ancient chapters make more sense of our culture than any philosophy you will find. This is our final point.

[15:01] These verses make sense of our world. So these verses make sense of why work and employment are a struggle. The most fulfilling jobs can be redundant. The easiest tasks, verse 17, can reap thorns and thistles.

Imagine planting a garden and instead you get thorns and thistles. Very frustrating. The nicest bosses, the friendliest colleagues, even they can be a painful toil.

Work is broken. The same goes for marriage and relationships. Once innocent, but now hiding and ashamed. This passage makes sense of the battle of the sexes, doesn't it?

There's a power struggle in marriages. Husbands, husbands, not leading, shirking their responsibilities. Wives, trying to take over instead. This is not so we can elbow the other one and go, Eh, that's your fault.

This is so it makes sense of how we each contribute to the problem. Adam and Eve, they were made everlasting and immortal.

[16:05] But now they will return to the ground. Doesn't this make sense of sickness and disease? Of never-ending doctors? Of backaches? And of course, death?

Verse 17, God said to Adam, Cursed is the ground because of you. That makes sense of earthquakes and floods, hurricanes, and of course, bushfires.

There is a deeper problem in the earth than climate change. Speaking of the environment, do you remember a few months ago the Extinction Rebellion?

Remember those protesters in the city? They were from the Extinction Rebellion. And their website says this. We're facing an unprecedented global emergency. Life on earth is in crisis.

We're in the midst of a mass extinction of our own making. And they are right. Life on earth is in crisis. Because we sinned. We tried to be like God.

[17:06] And so now we're facing his just and measured judgment. These ancient chapters make more sense of our world than any philosophy you can find. But they also make sense of our inner struggles as well.

I put this on the handout just to finish. The central choice for every temptation. Do you want to be gods or be gods?

Do you notice the spelling there? Do you want to be gods? To decide good and evil for yourself? To be fully autonomous? Or do you want to be gods?

Apostrophe S. Do you want to belong to him? You see the tragedy of Genesis 3 is not necessarily the curses. As bad as they are. But that they sold out God for something they already had.

You will be like God. That was the con. But they already were. Made in his image. Relating. Ruling. Ordered and good.

[18:09] They were already as like God as they could be. But they were conned into giving him up for a lie. Romans 1. Which is our New Testament passage.

It comes right out of Genesis 3. And in Romans 1. Which Dorothy read. It says this. Although they claimed to be wise. They became fools.

And exchanged the glory of the immortal God. For images. Made to look like a mortal human being. Birds. And animals. And reptiles.

And our culture is so gullible. We fall in for the con. We try to be like God. You see in Melbourne. The key to well-being is more of you.

More of me. Something wrong. You need more self-assertion. Self-love. Achievement in life. You need more self-belief. You want happiness. You need more autonomy.

[19:05] No one will tell me what to do. I will grow up and break free. And decide for myself. But Genesis 1 and 2 says. The key to happiness and fulfillment and significance and identity is more God.

He is where all those good things are to be found. We were created to be God-wood. Not inward. We are God-made.

Not self-made. We are God-commanded. Not self-determined. Not self-determined. In love. He wanted to save Adam and Eve from the pretense that they could be like him.

And so he put a command around the tree. In this passage he's always called the Lord God. What sort of God is the Lord? He's a loving father.

He's a loving father who wanted to protect his children. But the serpent conned them into thinking he was a crazy dictator and a liar.

[20:06] And so they swapped him out and tried to be like him themselves. In every temptation we face we are choosing to either be our own little gods or to belong to God.

The script is always the same. Genesis 3. It's tough love today. We're in a mess. But don't worry. Because the rest of the Bible is a rescue story. Because eventually you get to passages like Luke chapter 3. Where you meet an offspring of Eve. Who faces the same cons from the same con man. But has an opposite outcome. An offspring called Jesus. Jesus who will crush the serpent's head. As was predicted. As he dies on the cross. To save us from our sin and shame.

And the judgment that follows. So I'm going to pray. And then we're going to say a confession together. And then we're going to sing about the blood of Jesus which saves us.
[21 : 10] So let me pray. Father God thank you that you are a good father. That you say things for our protection and our care.

Like a good dad would. And Father please help us to see the script for what it is. To not be gullible when we face temptation.
To not think we can be like you. But to trust in your goodness. Please keep us in the battle with sin. Please lead us not into temptation.
We ask in Jesus name. Amen.