

Hope for the Divided

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, like Harry said, today we're going to talk about a difficult topic, relational brokenness. It might bring memories or even present difficult relationships to the surface.
- ! And relationship issues are often complex and nuanced, so we can't cover all the nuances in 25 minutes. But what I do want to say in 25 minutes is that there is hope. In Jesus. But because this is a difficult topic, let's pray. Help us, Lord, as we seek to understand our own brokenness and the impact of our brokenness to the people and the world around us.
- But also help us to see the hope that Jesus offers. In his name we pray. Amen. Broken relationships are everywhere, aren't they?
- From global scale conflicts like wars between Russia and Ukraine, between Palestine and Israel. More regional or national conflicts like the civil unrests in Myanmar or Sudan or Ethiopia or many, many other places.
- [1 : 2 9] To more private broken relationships like friendships that fall apart or divorced marriages or estranged family members.
- Difficult issues. Difficult issues. Difficult issues. Why is life full of broken relationships? Why are we so prone to having broken relationships?
- How did we get here? Surely, surely we were not created for this. Well, you might think of many reasons why. Selfishness.
- Anger. Violence. Opposing values. Clashing personalities. Clashing political agendas. And they're all true.
- But the Bible goes deeper and provides an underlying reason that is common to everyone. And which is the cause of all this mess.
- [2 : 3 3] In our first reading from Genesis, the Bible provides a picture of what happened shortly after the creation of the world. God created everything to be good in chapter 1.
- He gave everything good for the first humans to enjoy. But instead of being thankful, humans wanted more. We always do.
- And so in Genesis 3, there's just two chapters after, there's a story about Adam and Eve eating the fruit that God has allowed them to eat.
- This is a story that a lot of us might already know. But the point is not about the fruit. But about what the fruit represents. The first humans thought that the fruit would make them be like God.
- To be the determiner of their own good and evil. You see, the first humans chose to disobey God because they wanted to be like Him.
- [3 : 4 4] They wanted to be the gods of their own lives. To be the determiner of what's good and bad for themselves and for everyone around them. And we call that sin.
- Now, I realize that the word sin carries a lot of baggage. It has been used to exclude and oppress. You're a sinner. Implication being, I'm not.

But no, what the Bible actually teaches is that everyone is a sinner. Because everyone wants to live like God, to do things their own way, and to force that onto others.

Even the very first humans did. Like Frank Sinatra said, I did it my way. Now, many people today will not have a problem with that.

What's wrong? What's wrong with wanting to do things our way? Well, if I want to do it my way, and you want to do it your way, who wins? This is why sin causes conflicts.

[4 : 57] People who have kids understand this, right? I have two kids who think about themselves and want to do things their own way all the time. What happens? Well, they fight.

They fight with each other, over toys, over time with mommy and daddy, over different ways that they want to play. They fight their parents because they want to do things their own way.

Now, you might think, that's normal, Ricky. That's normal. Kids do that. Oh, definitely it's normal. Because sin is in everyone, so we don't know otherwise.

It is normal. But it doesn't mean that it's good. And it's not only kids who do it. Adults do this too.

We might fight over ideas, over values, because we think that our values are better than the others. Or in some places, they fight over lands.

[6 : 06] That's why they have wars. And even in our most philanthropic act, we still want to do that act in our own way.

And we fight others who are trying to stop us. I was once in a work meeting, not here, that was trying to resolve a particular conflict in the company.

And yet, the people in that meeting had a conflict about how to resolve that conflict. Because everyone in that meeting thought that they knew the best way to resolve that conflict.

So, sin, that desire to be the determiner of what's good and bad for myself and for others, puts us in conflict with others and with the God who created us.

In Genesis 3, as soon as the first humans disobeyed, what did God do? He didn't destroy them.

[7 : 13] He reached out. He called out. And yet, the humans ran away and hid.

Their relationship with God was damaged. And then when God asked, what happened? the man blamed his wife.

She did it! And the wife blamed the snake. Both of them were wrong.

Both of them disobeyed. But sin blinded them of their own mistakes and so they blamed others. Prior to sin, Adam called Eve the bone of my bones, the flesh of my flesh.

Shakespeare material. Now straight after sin, he called her, that woman you put here. He was blaming the woman and God for his own choices.

[8 : 21] The first marital conflict. No, the first human conflict happened because of sin. This is how we got here.

Yes, we have conflicts because of our selfishness and anger issues and violence and pride, but the source of all those things is the sin in our hearts. Because we all want to be gods and do things our own way because we all think we know what's good and bad.

we want to decide that, we want to enforce that onto others. Now, you might say, all right, but even with all that sin in my heart, the conflict that I could cause would never be as bad as that war in Ukraine or in Palestine.

I could never do that. Well, let me tell you a story. Adolf Achman was one of the Nazi architects of the Holocaust who escaped after World War II to South America.

The conflict that the Nazis caused was pretty bad, right? Again, you might think, oh, my sin would never cause me to do that. Well, in 1960, he was caught and brought to a trial.

[9 : 50] they had to find witnesses who saw him commit the terrible crimes against humanity he was charged with. And one of the witnesses was a man named Yehiel Denur, a Jew.

And when he came in to testify, he saw Achman and immediately broke down, falling to the ground and sobbing.

some time later, Denur was interviewed. The interviewer asked him, what happened? Why?

Why it happened? Denur said that he was overcome by the realization that Achman was not some demon but was an ordinary human being like himself.

he said, I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this exactly like he.

[10 : 58] later on, Hannah Arendt, a German historian who was also watching the trial, reported that Achman was by no means psychopathic.

Instead, he was an ordinary man who had wanted to build a career for himself. That's all of us. She called this the banality of evil.

Evil lurks in the heart of all quite ordinary human beings. Us. We all sin.

We all want to do things our own way and decide what's good and evil for ourselves and for others. And given the power, opportunities, and resources, the conflicts and division and destruction that we could cause are quite scary.

So is there hope? Yes. That sin needs to be put to death and someone has done it. This is what our second reading from Ephesians 2 says, verse 11 to 13.

[12 : 19] Therefore remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done in the body by human hands.

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Here the reading starts with a reminder of that reality, the conflict, that relational brokenness. During that time there was a relational separation between the Jews and the Gentiles, non-Jews.

The Jews called the other people groups uncircumcised, meaning they're not clean, they're not chosen by God, they're not holy.

[13 : 27] But this separation is true in other relationships as well. Growing up as a Chinese-Indonesian, I've had my fair share of being excluded or discriminated against or called using derogatory terms.

We are divided people, we are broken relationally. And just like in Genesis 3, in verse 12 there, the broken relationship between people and the broken relationship between people and God are depicted hand in hand.

The Gentiles were separated from the Jews because they're separated from God and from Christ. Christ. I've used this analogy before.

My phone and the computer back there are connected to each other and so I can change the slides using my phone. I'm not going to try it now because it takes a lot of setting up to do.

I can change the slides using my phone. But they're not connected directly. They're connected through the same Wi-Fi. so my phone is connected to the Wi-Fi, the computer is connected to the Wi-Fi and so they are connected to each other.

[14 : 46] And so if the mutual connector, the Wi-Fi, is broken, then the connection between my phone and the computer will also be broken. The same goes with human beings.

We have a relationship with each other because we have a mutual life connection with God, our creator, our mutual creator.

When that's broken, our relationship with each other is also broken. Hence the conflicts. We fight because we fight.

And so what did God do when all humans that he created wanted to be gods because of their sin? Just like in Genesis 3, God reached out.

Here, the real God came down to be human, put the human sin onto himself, and died for them to kill that sin.

[15 : 53] Hence verse 13, but now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ. The separation between God and humans, the separation between humans and humans, we're all far away from each other and from God, but God drew near in Jesus and by his blood, that is, by his death, he brought us all near.

In Jesus, the separation is no more because the cross is a bridge. How is that possible? How did Jesus' death accomplish that?

Well, in another place in the Bible, it's explained. All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. How? God made him, Christ, Jesus, who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[17 : 09] The sin that made us separate from God and from each other, the sin that made us want to do things our own way all the time, the sin that constantly blamed others instead of ourselves, was put onto Christ, he was made to be sin and then when he died he took that sin into death with him and left it there when he came back to life.

Understand this, we're all fighting, none of us wants to surrender to the other, but God came in the person of Jesus and surrendered his life first.

All of us want to be gods and fight each other, but the only true God came and surrendered his life for us. Jesus brought peace because he became peace.

He showed us what peace looks like. peace now, think about all the broken relationships around us and beyond.

What do these broken relationships need to be mended? Some people need apologies to be expressed. Well, and in Jesus we are given the ability to apologize because we know that we are sinners.

[18 : 52] It's true, I've experienced it. If you've grown up in an Asian family or if you know of an Asian family, you know how hard it is for Asian fathers to apologize.

Right? My dad never apologized to me. And as a father myself, it's very hard for me to apologize to my kids.

especially when I think that they're the ones who are wrong and who are naughty. But several times when my kids are naughty and I lose my temper and yell at them, a few minutes later I am given the ability to self-reflect, swallow my pride, and then go to them and apologize for yelling.

Kai, I'm sorry for shouting at you earlier. Do you forgive me? Even though I know that they're the ones who were naughty and made me angry. Why?

Because in Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. And in every single conflict, I contribute to the breaking of the relationships, regardless of whether my contribution is smaller or larger than the other person.

[20 : 20] And broken relationships are mended when we are given the ability to apologize. And in Jesus, we are given that hope. When I ask Kai to apologize to me, he doesn't.

But when I apologize first, usually he does. Now, some other people stand on the other side of the equation.

They don't need apologies. They need the ability to forgive. Because even though apologies have been expressed, they find it impossible to get rid of that bitterness and deep hurt in their hearts.

But there is hope for this too in Jesus. Several weeks ago, I told you about Louis Zamperini, an American Second World War soldier who was tortured by the Japanese soldiers.

After the war, his life was full of bitterness which led to depression and alcoholism. But after putting his faith in Jesus, he was given the ability to forgive.

[21 : 37] So he went to Japan, met the former soldiers who tortured him, told them about Jesus and hugged them one by one. This is a more recent story.

Danny and Lila Abdullah are Christians from Sydney. In 2020, three of their kids died. children were 13, eight, and seven years old.

They were out getting ice cream and they were hit by a drunk driver. Imagine the pain. Imagine the bitterness that you would feel towards the drunk driver.

And yet, during the trial, when the two families were sitting on opposite sides of the courtroom, Danny walked right up to the other side and shook their hands. He said, look, I know I've experienced loss, but so have you.

The father of the drunk driver apologized to Danny for what his son had done, and Danny told him that he had forgiven him. He later wrote, from the outside looking in, what Christ did on the cross seems strange, maybe incredible, but now, after experiencing this grief, I understand so much more.

[23 : 02] Christ's forgiveness on the cross is the only reason I can move towards others with the spirit of forgiveness. He lost three kids on the same day.

How do these people like Danny and Lila and Louise and Perini find the ability to forgive? well, like he said, in Jesus on the cross, because in Jesus we realize that we are more sinful than we thought, that the Son of God himself had to come down here and die, and yet we are more loved and accepted and forgiven than we could ever imagine.

forgiven. And so we are given the ability to forgive others. There's hope for reconciliation in Jesus because both the ability to forgive and the ability to apologize are given to us.

Danny extended his hand of forgiveness to the drunk driver and his family because God has extended his hand of forgiveness to him first in Jesus on the cross.

And so now if you're hearing all this and you're feeling inspired and you think you can do this, you just need to apologize or forgive, let me tell you that if you don't have Jesus, it's impossible.

[24 : 49] Even for those who have Jesus, it's still very, very hard. But we know it's possible. We have hope. Because we have experienced perfect reconciliation and forgiveness in Jesus.

That every single time we do wrong, every day we are forgiven in Jesus perfectly. But if you haven't tasted that forgiveness in Jesus, then you'll be overcome by guilt, by pride, and by bitterness.

forgiveness. So the first thing to do is to ask forgiveness from Jesus first. And then you'll have hope.

Well, like I said at the start, relationships are complex and nuanced. And so even if you have Jesus, there's no guarantee that the other person or the other party will want to mend broken relationship.

But there's hope. Because you'll be, you will be given the capacity to apologize and to forgive.

[26 : 08] And that is life-giving and freeing in itself. So friends, there is hope in Jesus for peace, for reconciliation, and for forgiveness.

Come and experience it yourself. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for what you have done on the cross.

That through your death, all our sins are forgiven. The multitudes of our sins are forgiven. So help us, Lord, through the power of your Spirit to live out that hope of reconciliation, that ministry of reconciliation.

in the way that we live, to share that hope to others around us. In the name of Jesus Christ, the one who died for us, we pray.

Amen.