

Banished

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 November 2024

Preacher: Chris Lowe

[0 : 00] And with Genesis 3 open in front of us this morning, let me ask, are you a glass half full person or a glass half empty person?

! Are you upbeat and positive about life? My glass is half full, things are good, they'll get better, let's live. Or are you generally more downbeat about life? My glass is half empty, life is hard, it's a mess, I can't see what will change, you've just got to bear it.

I ask because at first glance in chapter 3 there is almost nothing upbeat and hopeful, is there? In this series on Genesis so far we've come through chapter 1. Chapter 1 tells of an eternal, powerful God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.

He spoke, there was light, order from chaos, a stable, teeming, glorious creation, this world of ours. And men and women, you and I made in his image with God-given dignity and responsibility.

We've come through chapter 2 and the close-up story of paradise. As the Lord God took dust and formed the man lovingly and placed him in this rich garden, here is food and water and beauty.

[1 : 22] There's a tree of life. There's another tree there, Adam. But that's not for you. Don't eat of it or you will die. Here is a companion, a woman, all you will need.

I'm your good creator, king, and I love you. Now trust me as your God. And Adam and Eve had all they needed and nothing to hide. Genesis 1 and 2 is the life we're created for, with our good God. But then comes chapter 3, the tragedy, the fall we call it. As Adam and his wife, as we humans, thrust our good God aside.

Taking and eating the fruit, we won't listen to you. We don't trust you. We won't have you as our God. Sin, disobeying God's good commands as they do in the garden, is now the natural setting of our hearts.

And the truth is, as Adam and Eve discover so quickly, sin is not only deeply offensive to God, it also poisons us. Because at some level, for all of humanity, shame and guilt mark us.

[2 : 34] And so, like Adam and Eve, we scramble to hide away, desperate to cover up what we're really like from each other, from God. We hide in fear.

Or we blame others around us, desperate to avoid being called to account by the God who is judge of all and knows the secrets of all our hearts.

Genesis 1, 2, half of chapter 3, I think we say so obviously connect with and make sense of life today, do they not? Who we are as humans in dignity, what we're made for, and what has gone so, so wrong in the world.

And this morning, verse 14 onwards, in these verses that Tyler read to us, bring more reality to us. As now, the Lord God addresses the snake, the woman and Adam, and spells out for them his response to their rebellion.

Because of what you have done, says God, this is what life will now be like. And not just for you, but stretching forward from Genesis 3, for the whole of humanity and the whole of human history, right down to 21st century Cambridge and life for us now.

[4 : 00] The words God speaks in verse 14 onwards then, explain and expose the reality of life now. Life in a fallen world, in a world which has turned from God in sin.

And what you read here, it is desperately awful, isn't it? Two things I want to show us this morning from Genesis 3, before we come to hope.

Genesis 3 forces us to get to grips with point one, real life. Painful, sweaty and death bound.

That is, and I don't need to tell you that because we're human beings and we live in this world. We do not live in a fantasy advertising world, do we? With beautiful people and wonderful marriages and fulfilling careers and carefree, everlasting lives.

No, no, no. Our existence now is scarred with conflict and frustration and decay. In verse 14 onwards, let me show this to you, let's see this together.

[5 : 05] God addresses the snake, then the woman, and then Adam. We'll come to the snake and verses 14 and 15 later. Let me read firstly from verse 16.

To the woman, the Lord God said, I will make your pains in childbearing very severe. With painful labour you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. That is life today. Back in chapter 1, verse 28, God blessed man and woman and said, Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

And so it's wonderfully, God-givenly part of our, who we are as humans, to come together in sexual intimacy and produce fruits. But walk into a labour ward, a delivery unit.

And what you will hear at times are screams of pain. Because childbearing can be brutal. It can half kill a woman.

[6 : 11] Less so these days in Britain, thank God, with good care, but still true. In this verse here, verse 16, come from the labour ward, if you like, to the family home.

End of verse 16. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Marriage, at the end of chapter 2, is a God-given good blessing.

Husband and wife meant to love one another fiercely. But what are so many marriages like in reality? Not the nice smile in public, we're fine, but behind closed doors where no one's looking.

Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. It describes a power struggle.

Jockeying for position and control.

As she tries to get her way and get on top and he, depending on his character, either stamps down straight away or just gives up for a quiet life before snapping at some point.

[7 : 22] Is that true? Move on in Genesis 3. To Adam he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat from it. Look at verse 17.

To Adam he said, To Adam he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat from it. Cursed is the ground because of you.

Through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.

Work. Back in chapter 1 God had said, Subdue the earth and rule over it. In chapter 2, work the garden and take care of it. It's a God-given good thing to work.

Not just eat and survive but thrive. And yet don't these verses in Genesis 3 describe work as it really is? Because now the ground of this created order is cursed and twisted out of joint and unmanageable.

[8 : 36] The word painful toil in verse 17 are actually the same words used for pains in childbearing in verse 16.

In English we say a woman goes into labour. We talk about work as labour. Same word. Similar experience. That is whether you're farming the land or cleaning the house or answering phones or teaching or working for a multi-year-old.

Or working for a multinational. You labour. And not always but so often you feel work is never-ending and frustrating and fruitless. It's like there's thorns and thistles growing all the time.

And the thing is work is such hard work. Sweaty and exhausting. I'm 49 years old. I was born in the north of England in the 1970s.

And for some men who lived around us the only job option was going down the mine. That is literally sweaty, brutal work. Eventually people's bodies just wore out and stopped.

[9 : 46] As they might for some of us. The fruit of our labour. But maybe you don't actually sweat or perspire at work.

But full-time care of children is just shattering. And teaching knocks you out. And sit behind a desk with all the stresses and strains of office life and it will drain you. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.

And the pop-up job advert that gets you on Facebook won't tell you. But real fulfilment and smiling job satisfaction is largely fantasy in our world now.

Child-bearing, marriage, work. Finally in verse 19, the cruelest blow of all. I will die. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.

Until you return to the ground since from it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you will return. In UK society, death is still pretty much a taboo subject, is it not?

[11:02] It mustn't talk about it. We airbrush old people out of life. Some of us are tempted to think that good pills and a fitness programme can keep you feeling forever young.

It is almost possible to pretend you might just keep going forever. But that is fantasy land. And we know it. The day will come when you and I take our last breath.

And we lie cold and still on the slab. You'll be buried or cremated. And the wind blows over you and you are gone. For dust you are and to dust you will return.

Genesis 3 forces us, I think, to consider real life. Real life. We do experience moments of beauty and happiness and joy and fulfilment right now in our lives.

Creatures within God's ongoingly good creation. And when that happens, thank him for it. And yet at the same time, from life's first cry to final breath, is this not what we encounter?

[12:14] Pain, conflict, sweat, drudgery, frustration, dust and death. That is not a glass half empty view of things, that. It is real life.

I don't know what I need to ask. I sort of need to ask myself, but I don't. Do you recognise this? Do you recognise this? That is, don't swallow the lie of the advertisers, the lure of celebrities or the promises of the prosperity gospel preacher.

Don't try to pretend to live a candy floss life. We're happy and we're having fun and work and relationships are great. And we'll keep going forever in our carefree lives with a kind of forced smile. It's not real that. We know this. When you have a good few months with no arguments, no illness, no pain, that is not baseline normal.

That is a special blessing from God. Normal, expected life now in this fallen world. Sweat, conflict, hurt and death, says Genesis 3.

[13:24] Okay, first thing. Let's go on with a second thing to say from these verses before we get to the hope at the end.

Because say someone in our world today does recognise the reality of suffering and frustration and how do you respond to that? One reaction in our culture, I think understandably, is to say, do you know what?

That's just the way the world is. Just how it is. It's natural. You're born, life's tough, you die, end of story. What are you going to do?

Just get used to it. Suck it up. Grab fun when you can, because this is life and there's nothing that you can do about it. But Genesis 3 says we mustn't think like that.

Because the life that we experience now, painful, sweaty and death bound, is not natural, just the way it is, end of story.

[14:32] Rather, in these verses, this is cursed life. It is not just the way it is. That is, and this is a massive thing for us to get to grips with, the reason that we suffer and sweat and die, is that the Lord Almighty has cursed this creation of ours.

As our Creator and Judge, purposefully, with his eyes open, he has pronounced a curse over us and all creation. He has twisted our world out of joint.

He has brought pain and death to us. And that is why life is as it is now. See this with me. With chapter 3 open, do you remember what's happened in the first half of chapter 3?

Tempted by the snake devil, Adam and his wife have turned from the Creator King who loves them. And honestly, to say to the God we belong to, I will not trust you, I will not obey you, is an almost infinite evil, that.

It is a deep offense against his holiness and majesty. And so what we see in verses 14 to 19 is God, the righteous judge, pronouncing his just sentence on his rebellious creatures.

[16:01] In verse 14, follow it through with me. The Lord God said to the snake, Do you see the language there?

Cursed are you. The God who says, let there be light, and there was light, whose words form and mould the world as he wants, he declares, cursed are you.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and it is so. Or look at verse 16 again. I will make your pains in childbearing very severe.

With painful labour you will give birth to children. I will surely do this, says God. And it is so. Or verse 17 again, very explicitly.

To Adam he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat of it. Because you disobeyed me.

[17:16] Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. Do you see that? Why today does work mean sweat and exhaustion?

Why do thorns and thistles come up? Why do floods sweep away livelihoods? It is not just the way it is. It is not nature with a capital N.

No, no, the living God who in the beginning blessed his creation, has actively cursed the ground. And it is the very same thing with death itself.

For having warned Adam in chapter 2 verse 17, If you eat of the tree you will surely die. Now in his settled active judgement, dust you are, and to dust you will return.

That is our dying and our returning to dust is God's punishing curse on our sin. As it says in the New Testament in Romans 6 verse 23, The wages of sin is death.

[18:30] And you see this so clearly as chapter 3 comes to its close. Where in verse 22 the Lord God said, The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever. And so the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he'd been taken.

After he drove the man out, Do you see? Get out, go away. He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden, Cherubim, fearsome guards, and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

I banish you. You cannot come back. You die. The end of Genesis 3 here, Our creator in his righteous judgment throws humanity out of his garden paradise into this world in which we live today.

This painful, sweaty, death-bound existence. Not normal life. Not just the way it is. And nor life has God created it to be.

[19:43] But instead we live every moment now under the blanket curse of God, our lives smothered with the dust of death.

And Genesis 3 says this is his doing. A God who's rightly angry with a world that has turned from him. I wonder if you see the world like that.

I wonder if you can believe what God says here. A couple of weeks ago we were staying in Manchester with a friend over half term and I went out for a jog early morning.

I love going out early mornings. It's a bit cold. I'm out by myself. I don't have to talk to anyone. In God's good creation. And it's quiet and the sun's about to rise and everything looks sharp and fresh. And I was thinking a bit about church and Genesis and jogging along. As I was jogging along I happened to glance right. And I was just pulled up short in the Manchester morning because I took a picture of it here.

[20:52] You can quite see it. Just before me on my right stretching into the distance stood hundreds and thousands of gravestones with the cloud and light behind.

Just there in the morning silence. I googled Gorton Cemetery. 18,000 graves I discovered later. And as I stopped and stared and took a picture because it was so beautiful and yet awful.

It just came to me so very clearly from Genesis 3 that every single wonky tombstone and every flower strewn grave. Each one of them is a brutal witness to the truth of God's cursing word.

To dust you will return. Because these graves are his doing. And they are the wages of sin. It's not how life is meant to be.

It's not how life is naturally. This is what Genesis 3 is holding before us. Pain in childbirth, sweat, frustration, thorns and thistles, my decaying body, my last breath.

[22:06] Cursed life. And rightly cursed life. Do you believe that? Am I asked at the start, are you a glass half full person or a glass half empty person?

Are you generally upbeat about life and positive? My glass is half full. Things are good. Let's live. Or are you more downbeat about life? My glass is half empty. Life is hard. It's a mess.

I can't see what will change. I've just got to bear it. Genesis 3 opens our eyes to life as it really is. In this created and fallen world. No pretense. No pretense here.

To which you could think, this is just entirely desperately awful. And in part, you'd be right.

pretend life's lovely and without descending into total black despair and that is because in the coming of Christ Jesus our Lord, sin and curse and death are dealt with and are overcome and overflowing to those who trust in him today and on the day Jesus returns comes grace and blessing and life forever.

and we're going to pray together.

[29 : 27] Let me lead us in a prayer and then we will sing. Let me lead us in a prayer and we will sing. Let me lead us in a prayer and we will sing. Let me lead us in a prayer and we will sing. Let me lead us in a prayer The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our Lord and our God you know we experience the life we have today full of sweat and pain and death a life under your blanket curse we say to you this morning that you are right and just in your judgment and that to turn from you is an almost infinite evil yet you are a God of overwhelming grace we praise and thank you that you do not leave this cursed world as it is but you the God who promises to bless have worked to overcome the curse thank you that in Christ there is eternal life for all who will believe thank you that the day will come when creation will be utterly restored and there will be no more curse and we will enjoy life and peace for all eternity please make us those who approach life with reality may we hold on to our Lord Jesus Christ and we pray that the message of eternal life through Christ would spread from here and from other churches all around the world and that millions upon millions would turn to Christ and discover the blessing in life that we enjoy we ask in Jesus name

Amen