

The Trustworthy God

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[0 : 00] Hi, everybody. It's really nice to see you all. My name is Aaron, and I'm the pastor for this service. I'd love to meet you if you're new. And I'd also say, you know, it's sort of intimidating turning up to a church with a lot of people. You don't know anyone.

I would encourage you to come downstairs afterwards. All you have to do is walk down and eat some food, and you might have a great conversation with somebody. So I'd encourage you to do that. I'd love to meet you anyway. So here we are. We are in the second week of a series. We're following along with Life Explored, which is a course happening in the home groups. And each week we're looking at a characteristic of God. And this week it's the trustworthy God. So we're looking at Genesis 3. You've heard it read, and you probably have some questions.

So I want to just make a few comments before we dig into the passage. First of all, some people do sort of write the story off, because it is an odd story. Like, it's an odd story.

There's naked people, and there's Eve in speaking of Parseltongue, and there's like a magic tree. And so it raises all these questions about like, what kind of literature is this? Is this like pre-modern metaphorical story? Is this an historical account of a real event?

[1 : 31] There's a great book called The Art of Biblical History by Phil Long. And just to borrow some phrases from him, he talks about Old Testament literature. He says, sometimes you're not looking at a photograph of what happens. You're looking at a painting of what happens. And a painting's much more useful because there's an artist, so there's a perspective. There is sort of, there's a medium or media, and that's a lot more useful to us. So what is this story? I don't know. Like, I'll say this. There is room for you to think at both ends. Whether you think this is a God-inspired, pre-modern metaphorical story and a historical event. Either way, it is a true story. Either way, it is God's Word, and it's trying to convey a very important truth to us. So don't let, you know, your idea of genre undermine the fact that this is Holy Spirit-inspired,

God's Word to us. And it's trying to answer the question, why is the world a mess? One more introductory comment. You might be thinking, you know, we're on page two of the Bible. Where did the snake come from? And is the snake Satan? And why would God make an evil snake and put it in the garden with the people? I will remind you of Star Wars and New Hope. So you remember Star Wars First Hope.

The opening scene is like the scroll. You know how the words sort of disappear into infinity? It's the scroll, opening words. It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships striking from a hidden base have won their first victory against the evil galactic empire. During the battle, rebel spies managed to steal secret plans, etc, etc, etc. So this is the first thing you see, and you're watching it. You've got lots of questions. Who are the rebels? Who's the empire?

Who started the civil war? Lots of gaps. But it's okay. You're basically just getting, you're just getting sort of sucked in and drawn into this ongoing story. And that's what's happening here in Genesis. We don't ever find out where the snake came from. Like we don't know this stuff.

We're just getting pulled into an ongoing story. So that's enough of a preamble, a quick bit of context before we get to the passage itself. Chapter two, in chapter two, God has created these magnificent humans, put them in this amazing place, and he's given them each other. And he's given them a vocation.

[4 : 15] He said, care for my creation. That's what I want you to do with your life. Care for my creation. It's wonderful. In the Life Explored series, one of the speakers describes it as this.

It's a paradise of yes and a single tree of no. So God has prohibited one thing, though. Don't eat of this particular tree. So now let's get into chapter three. So they're in paradise, paradise. And the snake wriggles up to the woman and says, his famous words, did God really say don't eat of any

tree? Did God really say that? It's so interesting, isn't it? The serpent wants to destroy humanity, wants to destroy this good thing that God has made. And there's two people there. And it's interesting to me that he doesn't sort of slither in and just like beat Eve, hit her with a stick. What does he do? How does he destroy God's good thing? How does he undermine it? How does he weaken God's? How does he do that? What's his strategy? His strategy is a suggestion. Just makes a suggestion.

It's not a compelling argument. It's just a little idea. Did God actually say you can't eat any of the fruit? He just smuggles this little idea into her brain that perhaps God is a bit stingy.

He doesn't deny the existence of God. He doesn't deny the holiness of God. He just denies the goodness of God. But in a very subtle way, just with a little suggestion. You can't eat any of the fruit? God really said that? Wow. Wow. That is, of course, not what God said. In the previous chapter, we read that, read about the abundance of this place that God had put them in. And he said, it is all yours. It's all yours. You can eat anything. It's not that one thing. You can eat anything. Just not that one thing over there. But the serpent changes the way Eve looks at it. God's so generous. But the serpent says, let's just focus on what you can't do. Let's just focus on the prohibition.

Maybe God isn't generous after all. Maybe God's a bit stingy. And it's such a contemporary doubt, isn't it? God, if I obey God, he'll keep me down. If I obey God, I'll miss out. If I follow God, I won't be happy. If I follow the will of God, it will keep me from being who I want to be.

[7 : 19] If you're one of those Christians, you will not thrive. You will not flourish. So there's this sort of change in perspective because of the suggestion. God, you know, away from God is generous and good and it's all just a paradise. A yes to...

Perhaps God doesn't have our best in mind. The serpent focuses Eve's mind on what we can't do. God is restrictive. God wants to restrict my full humanity. So how does Eve respond?

Verse 2, And the woman said to the serpent, So she sort of defends God, right? It's a sort of defense. You know, we can eat of the fruit of the trees. Actually, what God actually said in chapter 2 was, you may eat the fruit of every tree.

Abundance. But the seeds of doubt are in Eve's mind now. She drops the word every.

And then she says, God said, don't eat the fruit of that one tree. Don't even touch it. Here's the problem. God never said that. God never said you can't touch the tree.

[8 : 47] But because of that little seed of doubt in there, Eve's questioning the goodness of God. So she sort of defends God, but she minimizes the provision, the abundance by dropping that word every.

And she magnifies the restrictions. You can't even touch the tree. And the serpent comes back and says, go ahead. Go ahead. Eat. Surely you'll not die.

That's the serpent's next line. Just eat up. Surely you won't die. What does this all mean? Well, a couple of things we should note here. Isn't it interesting, and I won't spend any time on this, but I find it very interesting that the first doctrine denied in the Bible is the doctrine of judgment.

The first great lie of the Bible is you can do anything you want and it will be okay. There are no consequences. I think that's interesting.

Also, the serpent's response. Listen to what the serpent says. This is very helpful to us.

[10 : 10] What is this forbidden fruit? What is this thing? It's the right to determine good and evil. That's what it is. It's the right to decide.

The tree is the symbol for deciding what is right and what is not right. So you see, sin is not so much doing naughty things.

Now, we can think of it as like, I did this naughty thing. I did this naughty thing. I'm sinning. It's not so much that in the Bible. It's more, this is how one guy phrased it.

He said, sin is not so much law-breaking. It's law-making. It's determining what the laws are. And why would we break God's law? Because we're not sure we can trust him.

We're not sure he has his best interests at heart. Perhaps he's withholding something from us. Perhaps we'd have a better life without him. This is a really important concept, I think.

[11 : 10] I'll say it again. So sin is not so much. So it's not, you could say, well, you know, sex outside of marriage is a sin because God decided and that's just, you know, that's just it.

God decided it. No, it's, sin is living our lives as though God can't be trusted. It's living our lives as if he doesn't love us absolutely.

Sin is not trusting God's vision for human flourishing. It's trusting the snake. It's trusting our own bias. It's trusting in our own social media-informed opinions about what the good life is. So we can look at these boundaries in life and we can say, well, they're just restrictions and God is miserly and he's trying to rip us off.

We can do that. That will lead to some bad decisions. So look again at the serpent's strategy here. It's very clever.

[12:14] For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil. God knows that. He knows that. So God is not this God that wants you to flourish.

God is now a rival. So we can look at these boundaries in life and say, oh, God is a rival. He's ripping us off. These are restrictions. It's not good. Or we can say, I trust you, God. You know the best way to be a human in this world.

So back to the story. So what does Eve do? Doubting the goodness of God, that little seed in there. What does she do with these ideas? Verse 6. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desired to make one wise and she took of its fruit and ate and she gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

Looks good. Feels good. Eat the fruit. Her mental doubts about the goodness of God spill out and overflow into action. She's no longer happy to trust in God's care.

[13:27] She takes control. She eats the fruit and it's awful. And there's a lot I could say about this and her. But I want to draw your attention to something else.

I want to draw your attention to Adam. Where is Adam in this whole story? What's he doing?

And he's, let me tell you something. He's here the whole time. Adam. We know it from verse 6. But he's there at the beginning as well and we know that because in the, this was written in Hebrew originally, that there's early in verse 4, the serpent says you, it's a plural you, it's yos.

The serpent is talking to two people. Adam is there the whole time and what is he doing? He's doing nothing. I find it fascinating thinking about these primal sins and I've been thinking about them this week, these first sins.

If Eve's sin was doubting the goodness of God and grasping onto joy on her own terms, looks good, feels good, I'm going to do it.

[14:42] If that was Eve's first sin, what was Adam's? It was passivity. The first human male sin was not violence.

It wasn't power plays. It was silence. He withdrew. He withdrew from his role as a partner and a companion. It's passivity.

Mentally, he just, he checked out of that situation and we see this played out all the time. Men just checking out. And of course, women do this as well.

You know, men sin like women and women sin like men. I just, I've been thinking this week whether there's something here though. And I don't know whether I'll get angry emails about this, but I've been wondering how much to read into this, how much to say about this.

So I'll say, let me just say this from my experience and I wouldn't say, I wouldn't generalize this, but I have seen when I think back about my friends who have left the faith, there's a good number of the women who left the faith because they grasped for joy on their own terms.

[16:00] Normally a boyfriend who wasn't a believer and pulled them away from faith because they were very, very lonely, completely understandable and this guy who wasn't a Christian loved them but eventually basically lost their faith because of it.

And I've seen men fall away from faith because they are spiritually lazy. They are just lazy. They don't turn up.

They don't turn up spiritually and they are passive. Now again, women sin like men and men sin like women. So I'm just going to leave that out there for you to think about. Perhaps that's relevant to you. If it is, great.

We can chat about it. Let's move on. Let's talk about the fallout of the sin. So here we've talked about the sin had happened. What's the fallout? Verse 7, Then their eyes both were opened and they knew they were naked.

That would have been a moment. And they sewed fig leaves together. They sewed these fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

[17:04] I mean, it's just, I think it's quite a pathetic image, right? They kind of, they realize they're naked and they're just like leaves. What do I do? I don't know. What do I do? You know. They're trying to cover themselves. They can't do it obviously properly.

And verse 8, it says this. They heard God. So what did they do? They hid in the trees. So the fallout of their sin, it's shame. It's shame.

And shame is such an awful thing. They were no longer vulnerable with each other. They feared. They focused their energy on covering.

They wanted to avoid God. They wanted to avoid His words. And isn't it deeply ironic where they run to? They run to the trees.

The trees were in the story that they represented the good gifts of God, right? These really good things. And that's where they hide.

[18:07] And it's just a, that's a strategy, isn't it? It's a strategy to hide from God. Amongst the good gifts He has given us. We find something.

We want to avoid God so we find something to grab a hold of. Something that is actually a good thing that God has made. And we hide in it. It could be, it could be sex.

It could be going from relationship to relationship to relationship. Relationship's a great thing. Sex's a great thing. But we can hide from God. We can let our mind just be like, you know, sucked into this, this whole thing.

It could be a cause. It could be anything. Any number of the good gifts that God has given us. Lots of ways to avoid God.

often in the good things He's given us. It's just terribly ironic, isn't it? So shame. But shame is not the only fallout here. Blame.

[19:13] Shame and blame. Do you notice they rhyme? Took me seven hours to come up with that. That's what you're paying me for.

Good stuff like that. It's weird you're not writing this down, Bree. This is really absolute gold. I mean, the blame stuff is just, it's just so pathetic, isn't it?

Like it's, God says to the woman, what have you done? You've, you know, this is terrible. What have you done? The serpent deceived me. Serpent. Serpent.

Not me. Serpent deceived me. Not my fault. God says to the man, and this is gold. God says to the man, why have you done this? What's going on? The woman whom you gave me, she gave me the fruit.

It's such, again, such a modern defense of ourselves. ourselves. Because in our current cultural moment and climate, society says you're good, and you're innocent, and you're perfect, and evil is something out there.

[20:27] It's out there. It's religion. It's a lack of education. It's a, it's something. It's not us. It's something else. It's not my fault, though.

So the fallout is shame, and it's blame. It's a reticence to take responsibility. It's our own up, to darkness in our hearts.

Now, goodness, this is all very serious, isn't it? What, is there any hope in this passage? Like, is there anything good going on here? And there is. It's lovely. Back in verse 8. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden, and 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.

But the Lord God called to them, called to them and said, where are you? So what do we learn? We learn, when we hide, God seeks. Okay, I'll say it again. When we hide, God seeks.

He comes after us. And this is the whole story of the Bible. You want a basic summary of the whole Bible? Hiding, God seeking us. He's determined to reverse the horror of the garden, of the tree sin.

[21:43] I'll finish here with this. Adam and Eve in the garden, and God said, obey me about the tree and you'll live. And they don't. They don't do it.

A long time later, Jesus is in a garden, Getsenium, and God says, obey me about the tree and you'll die. Obey me about the tree and you'll be crushed.

And he did obey. And that death meant life for us. Folks, the sermon this week is called, The Trustworthy God.

Given what we've learned about ourselves, given what we know about our God, the God who seeks us when we hide, this is a God we can trust. This is a God we can trust.

Amen.