

The Trustworthy God

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[0 : 0 0] Genesis 3. It's a very big chapter. Would you mind turning to it? Pages 2 and 3. Some chapters in the Bible stand higher than others. When you stand on top of them, you can see further, wider, broader, make sense of the world and our lives. One of the most important is this one, Genesis 3. It explains why the world is like it is. It explains why we are frightened of each other. It explains why we don't love God naturally. It explains violence.

It explains pollution. In fact, we can't begin to understand ourselves, our world or the coming of Christ apart from Genesis 3. It's a big chapter and we're going to spend about seven hours on it today. Those barricades, I put them back in place to keep you here.

We're in the second week of a seven-week series, following along, some of our small groups are following along a series called Life Explored, which is really aimed for folk who have no experience of Christianity or the church. It's based on a question. It's a very clever question.

It says, what if the God you don't believe in, the God you've rejected, what if he's not the real God? I think it's a great question because most of the reasons for rejecting God have one thing in common and that is they all suppose that God's a bad God.

You know, the conflict between science and faith or that Christianity has done so much damage in the past. Why would I believe in that God? Or that the Bible is regressive and repressive to women or it's going to limit my sexual freedom? Or simply the extraordinary bitterness of human suffering, of innocent children dying and of violence and terrorism and suffering which is hard to bear.

[2 : 0 5] All of these reasons for rejecting God share this in common, that God, the God of Christianity is a bad God. I mean, if he could fix all this and he doesn't, why not? I think I could make better decisions.

I'm going to make my own decisions. I'm not going to worship him. And I think this is where Genesis 3 has such extraordinary power. I mean, for starters, just look where it is. Genesis 3 comes after Genesis 1 and 2 and before Genesis 4. It's my, you pay me to point out the obvious.

What's Genesis 1 about? Genesis 1 shows the massive power of God in creating all things.

Beautiful. The generosity of God. And he makes them good, good and very good. The skies and the stars and man and woman in his image and creatures on earth and wiggly things, unmatched power. And then in chapter 2, it widens our understanding of the sheer kindness and goodness of God. He places man and woman in the paradise garden and every discovery awaits them. Every delight awaits them. There's aesthetic harmony and there's harmony of perfection. They're naked and unashamed and naked before God. It's just goodness all around. And what is chapter 4 about? Chapter 4 is about murder. The first son of Adam and Eve murders his younger brother in bloody violence. It's violence within a family. And then he tries to hide it. And as the chapter goes toward a conclusion, sons and sons and sons, there is a song at the end of the chapter. It's a rap tune. And it extols and praises and celebrates the spread of violence.

What happened? What's the change? There's a massive change from Genesis 1 and 2 to the world we have now. You read Genesis 4, you could be reading a news feed from today. Why is there so much pain and suffering?

Why do we as human beings have this astonishing capacity for good as well as evil? And why are we so naturally suspicious of God and of each other? Why are you so hard to love? And me as well.

[4 : 3 9] And Genesis 3 is just this astonishing chapter. So I want to look at it under three headings. The cause of all these problems, the consequences of the cause, and then the cure. And I'm going to spend most time in number one, the cause. And you can see where it begins right in the first verse.

You see the line in verse 1 of chapter 3. Now the serpent was more crafty, clever, subtle, than any other beast the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, even though Adam is there, did God say, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree of the garden? That's not exactly what God said. It begins with a distortion of God's word. So here we are in the garden. Here are two creatures having a theological conversation about the word of God, just sharing their opinions about the word of God as though their opinions count for anything. And what the snake says is so clever. Did God really say, you shall not eat of any tree? It's close to what God actually said, you can eat from every tree except one. But Satan turns it over and looks at the negative.

He goes straight for FOMO. F-O-M-O. Fear of missing out. That is a disease that is spread by social media today. It's the anxiety that everyone else is having fun somewhere else and you're not. It's a fear of missing out. It's like when we pass my granddaughter around and I have to give it to someone else. I have FOMO. I want to have a bag. The sin is not about, this temptation is not about sex or it's not about morality. It's not about fruit. From the start, it's about whether God's really good or not. Whether God's holding something back from us. And the only way to begin to feel this way about God is by believing this lie. Satan's a liar and he wants us to believe these lies about God, that God's not really good. And he's worked on that every day and every hour and every minute ever since in our lives. And he does it with two main lies in this first point. This is the cause. Two main lies. The first is unbelief, where we undermine our confidence in the goodness of God. And the second is pride, where we enlarge our confidence in the goodness of ourselves. They're the two basic lies. So let me look at them both. Unbelief. Back in chapter two, God said you can eat of any tree except one.

And as I've just said, the way Satan puts it, he shifts it to the negative, away from the focus of God's goodness and generosity to suggest maybe God's being a bit stingy and selfish. The implication is God doesn't really want the best for you. He's restricting your personal choices.

I mean, it's ridiculous that you shouldn't be allowed to eat of that one tree. I mean, you just can't trust God. He looks down on us and he sees that we're having fun and he says, stop it.

[7 : 45] That's too much happiness and pleasure and enjoyment. You'd be much happier if you made your own rules and did your own thing. Ever have that voice in your head? And you can see it's already beginning to work on Eve by how she answers in verse two. She says, 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's in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it. God didn't say that. Lest you die.

So she is thinking God is a bit strict. And then she introduces this uncertainty. The less you die in the Hebrew is a little bit unsure. Maybe just that, maybe that's an empty threat.

And Satan opens the, Satan sees the door opening for unbelief and he immediately comes back with, you will not die. Any reasons God's doing this is he doesn't really want you to be happy.

And he begins by casting this lie like a bait with a hook in it. And he finishes by brazenly denying the judgment of God, which is what he's been doing ever since. So when you ever hear someone denying the judgment of God, you know, it's the snake speaking. And no sooner is lie number one, unbelief and the goodness of God out in the open, when he brings lie number two along. And this is the lie of pride in verse five. Why does God not want you to eat it? Verse five, he says, God knows that when you eat it, your eyes will be opened. You will be like God, knowing good and evil, deciding what's good and evil.

Can you hear what Satan is saying? He's saying, he's just keeping you down. He's holding onto his position very tightly. You should, don't let him do it. You should just reach up and grab it. Take it, take it into your own hands and you'll be like God. Now, here's a question for us this morning.

[9 : 42] Why did God put that one tree? Why didn't he let them eat every tree? Why didn't he rip that tree out or put a fence around it or electrify it or something? Why did he leave that tree in the garden?

I think at a surface level, it's partly so that Adam and Eve have the dignity of choice and love and they're not, they're not just robots. They're tested, but there's a deeper reason and it's 11.

In verse 11, when God is speaking and asking them questions, have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? That's the reason.

There's nothing dangerous or poisonous about the tree. It's not bad for them. The tree is not going to give them a tummy ache or a disease. It's not an early paleo diet. It's simply because I commanded it and no other reason. He's calling on them to not eat the tree, not because it pays anything or because it's useful or they're going to get something as a prize, but simply God says,

because I said so, I'm God. You are not. You should not need any other reason than that. You see, Satan wants them to begin asking the question, why should I obey? And as soon as we begin to ask that question, the lie is already working. We're already beginning to put ourselves in the place of God, making myself the one who determines what's right and wrong.

[11 : 12] The tree is the alternative to God's way. And by giving Adam and Eve one tree in the garden, he's calling on them to do the right thing, not because of fear, not because of profit, but simply because of the beauty of God himself. Because God is God and that is who he is.

That is how God's made us, to honour him and his goodness. That's why when we turn to him, we want to be like him. That's why we pray during the Ten Commandments this morning, incline our hearts.

We want to be truthful because he's truthful. We want to be generous because he's so generous. We want to sacrifice ourselves for each other because that's what Christ has done. And here is something absolutely unique about the God of the Bible. From beginning to end, his concern in his relation with us is about love. It's not about servile grovelling.

It's not the push and pull of a transactional contract. It's love. We love him because he first loved us. That's what a Christian is. A Christian is basically someone who has fallen in love with Jesus Christ. That's what we're doing as a church. We're trying to grow deeper in our love for Jesus Christ and enable other people to come and love him too. And so here in the garden, God puts a tree that's out of bounds and calls Adam and Eve to obey him, not because they're going to gain something, not because they should be frightened of losing something, simply because of how beautiful God is. Do you remember a couple of months ago when we were in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus told a little parable about himself. He said, The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. On finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Remember when we looked at that, we saw what a financially crazy and impractical thing it is. I mean, what use is having one pearl when you sell all you have? And that's the point. Jesus is saying that his value to us is not what he can do for us.

[13 : 17] His great value is himself. All the blessings that God gives us in Jesus Christ can't be separated from him. All those things, protection and pardon and provision and peace and eternal life, they're in him. He is the pearl of greatest value.

That's why the fundamental temptation in the Garden of Eden and ever since has been to trust something else above God, in place of God, for my own happiness.

It's to replace God with something or someone or something else. And Satan wants us to put ourselves into that place and to seduce us to exchange the truth of God for a lie.

C.S. Lewis, in his book, Mere Christianity, says, all that we call human history, money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empire, slavery, it's the long and terrible story of man trying to find something other than God that will make him happy.

This is what's at the root, the Bible says, of antagonism and exploitation and violence and hatred and lies and greed. I'm trying to play God.

[14 : 28] And if I'm trying to play God and you're trying to play God, we're going to get in each other's way. So we come to this very sad verse, 6. The woman sees the tree is good for food, delightful to look at, desired to make her wise.

She took the fruit and ate and she gave some to her husband who was with her all along saying absolutely nothing. And he ate. And they're opened and they knew they were naked and they sewed leaves together as loin cloths.

That's the cause, unbelief and pride. What are the consequences? I just, before we look at the, I just want you to recognize how much pain there is in this chapter.

It's very difficult for us to conceive how painful a loss it was to lose the relation with God that they had had and the relation with God, with each other that we didn't, we never had that before.

It's hard for us to imagine. And the consequences as they're revealed here in the chapter are twofold, shame and blame. The shame, well, you can see it.

[15 : 36] Verse 8, they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. What did they do? The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees.

What a great place to hide yourself. And the Lord God called the man and said, where are you? He said, oh, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked.

I hid myself. Instant fear. First time in the scriptures. Fear, embarrassment, anxiety in the presence of God and each other. Whenever we try and play God, there is this instant loss of trust in each other.

And we have to hide from each other with fig leaves. And they made fig leaves to hide from God and from each other. They put the tree in front of them. It's just devastating.

They've lost their desire for God. God has now become someone to hide from. And it's a change at the level of the soul. Nothing has changed about their bodies.

[16:39] They haven't suddenly put on massive weight and looking ugly. But they recoil from each other and from God. Insecure and anxious and guilty and shamed.

Explains why we hide from God and why we hide from each other. It's just the consequences of trying to play God. And all of us have been on the run from God at some time or other. All of us have tried hiding from God.

It's one of the reasons it's so difficult to invite people to come to church. I mean, there's an embarrassment and a reluctance. Because people are afraid that if they come, they might hear the voice of God coming and saying, Where are you?

What have you done? Shame. And blame. It's lovely. You know, God's not hiding.

He comes and asks questions. Where are you? Who told you? Have you eaten? What have you done? And verse 12, Adam steps up to answer. And what does he do with his answer?

[17:41] Fantastic. He lays off responsibility on his wife, Eve. And then he lays off responsibility on God. He says, The woman you gave me.

She did it. I'm completely blameless in this affair. Eve, Eve, Eve, the snake you gave me. I'm completely blameless.

It's brilliant. Because instantly, their new relationship, this is the result of sin, the consequence of sin, is how they handle truth.

Now they use truth in power. They use truth to make themselves into the victim, to excuse themselves. They spin truth so that they can be the aggrieved party.

This is who we are. You know, the Bible distinguishes between sin, singular, which is the disease, and sins, plural, which are the symptoms. Jesus himself says that the source of evil is within us.

[18:46] That's why, even though they're wonderful, no amount of morality and education and ethical management is going to deal with it. God himself has got to come and deal with this disease. It's so deeply woven into our souls.

It's not that we do bad things and therefore become, it's, we sin because we're sinners. We try to usurp God's place.

We put ourselves at the center. We resist life in God's world under God's rule. And how on earth is God going to deal with this? How is God going to deal with evil and rescue us?

If sin is deeply embedded in us, how can he pull the evil out of us and rescue us and deal with the evil? And that comes to the third heading, and that's the cure. However, I've said this before from the pulpit, but the great surprise is that the Bible doesn't finish at Genesis 3, 13.

If you've been reading the story until now, you expect that's it. They're going to die. We're expecting accountability and punishment for the serpent and the woman and the man. And there is punishment and there is accountability, but it's full of grace and it's full of kindness and it's full of hope.

[19:59] Because God continues to love Adam and Eve, even though they have rejected him and they've tried to become like God, they've tried to play God. And even though they've believed lies about God, and even though they've made this pathetic attempt to hide from him, and even though they no longer desire or love God, he comes and he calls, where are you?

He knows they're hiding. As he knows, some of us are hiding, but he still calls, where are you? He wants us, as he wanted them to take responsibility, to be reconciled.

He won't judge until he knows the facts. Later in the chapter, in verse 21, he gives them better protection than their fig leaves that are falling apart. He takes animal skins so that they're covered. He doesn't pretend nothing has happened. He does not carry out the sentence of death immediately, but he acts to cover their sin with a new garment. It's a lovely picture.

A lot of people have seen here a reflection of the sacrifice of Jesus. You know, an animal has to be sacrificed for these skins to cover them. And there's a greater sacrifice that's coming with terrible personal cost to God himself to deal with the root of the evil in us.

[21 : 19] But I think it's in the judgment on the serpent where we have the real glimmer of the gospel and how we'll bring the cure. And we looked at this verse recently.

Verse 15, as God speaks to the serpent, he says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Interesting. He doesn't make the promise to man and woman. He makes the promise to Satan because, you see, there are bigger issues than just the salvation of man and woman.

Our salvation is very important to God. He will die to bring us to salvation. But it's part of a greater rescue and redemption from evil.

And it's the promise of a conflict and the sending of a champion. God is going to deal with evil and Satan through sending one offspring, a particular boy, who is going to overcome Satan and death and evil by the giving of his own life.

[22 : 23] Here we are, Genesis 3, it is a prophecy of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Though he was in the form of God, didn't hold on to that. But he gave himself and took on human likeness for us.

We tried to be like God. He became like us and gave himself even to death on the cross. And he takes on to himself that evil of ours.

And he dies on that other tree to show the real God and to give us life. It means, of course, we don't have answers in ourselves.

I can't undo Satan's work in you. You can't undo Satan's work in me. The only way, the only way back is seeing what he has done and turning back to him in unreserved trust.

And I invite you to do that now. And every time you're invited, every time we get close to this, the voice of the snake comes into the ear. You sure about this? Not yet.

[23 : 29] You can still be the centre of your life for a little while. It's okay. You won't really die. And then we hear the voice of Jesus and he says, come to me, come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden.

And I will give you rest. Take my yoke on me. Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. You will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Amen.