

Truth and Consequences

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: 05 November 2006

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Our Father, we thank you that you take delight in us through Jesus Christ.

We pray this morning through your word that you would teach us to take delight in you. And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, the 20th century has been a very difficult century for utopians.

It began well with the writings of Karl Marx and a high view of science and technology. I can well remember at university first reading Marx and thinking how wonderful this is.

Apart from the fact that he's an atheist, it was very attractive. And in Das Kapital, part of what Marx gets at is human alienation.

That when we work and we don't own our work, our work becomes alienated from us. And we become alienated from it. And we become alienated from ourselves and from our community.

[1 : 12] But all the 20th century utopian philosophies, as we know, ended up as graveyards for millions. Marxism, communism, socialism.

And it seems as though the way back to the Garden of Eden has been absolutely solidly blocked. But now, at the turn of the new millennium, with the advent of computers, biotechnology and nanotechnology particularly, there has been a resurgence of utopian rhetoric.

There's been a shift in thinking. Increasingly, we are hearing and reading that human beings are carbon-based machines.

The old view was that you received human nature if you were born from a human mother. Human nature was something that was a given. But with the help of technology, the idea is growing that we no longer need these carbon-based bodies, that we can upgrade like computers.

In fact, there are people who are seriously trying to upgrade human consciousness into computers and to technology that's not going to wear out like this carbon-based body. I tell you this, this is not the lunatic fringe saying this.

[2 : 34] Some of you may know the writings of Ray Kurtweil. He has received some of the highest degrees in the United States for innovation and technology from MIT. He has 12 honorary doctorates presented to him by three presidents.

And Bill Gates calls him the best at predicting the future of artificial intelligence. In 1999, he wrote a book called The Age of Machines, When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence.

And last year, he wrote a book which is called The Singularity is Near, When Humans Transcend Biology. He argues that our technology is so rapidly increasing that that increase is going to become exponential.

That's the singularity you see. And when that happens, we are going to be able to combine our human intelligence with non-human silicon chips, merging biological and non-biological life forms, producing, and I quote, immortal software-based humans.

That's your future. And of course, it's a vision that requires that human nature and human freedom lose all its limits.

[3 : 47] And I think it helps explain why Kurtzweil's books are all on the New York bestseller list. This is the new thinking that through technology, we can actually change human nature and life itself.

We can leave behind these clumsy carbon bodies and transcend our biological limits. That we can decide for ourselves what it means to be humans. In fact, we can control our future.

We can engineer what kind of humans we want to be in the future. It is a perfect example of what it is to reach out and try and grab the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And it's a wonderful contrast to our passage this morning, which is the second half of Genesis 3. If you want to open it, it's on page 3. And as you opened it, I think the great shock about this second half of Genesis 3 is that it exists at all.

Don't you think the Bible ought to finish at 3.13? There ought to be nothing else after 3.13. You remember God created the world with blessing and he placed the blessing within boundaries and he placed man and woman in the garden, a place of beauty and plenty and innocence and exquisite joy, gave them every tree to eat except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because God says, in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

[5 : 11] And the snake comes and suggests God can't really be trusted and in their unbelief and their pride, they take the tree and they decide that we are going to be the ones who decide what is good and evil.

We are not going to be restricted by what God says and so they take the fruit of the tree. And do you remember last week we saw that no sooner do they grab the tree, then all the unity and harmony, the openness and the vulnerability is lost and it's replaced with fear and shame and guilt. And God himself comes walking in the garden and they hide because they are afraid of God and his word and they are afraid it's going to expose who they really are.

And so God very kindly questions them. What have you done? Where are you? Who told you? So that by the time we come to the end of verse 13, all their excuses are gone and all their blaming has finished and at the end of verse 13, surely God should just execute his sentence.

That's it. No more world. No more humans. The reason I say that is I think as we move through this section this morning, we need to be very clear that everything that is happening is an astounding miracle of God's grace.

[6 : 24] The surprise is not that there is just punishment. The surprise is that God allows Adam and Eve to continue and adds grace upon grace upon grace through this section.

You see, it's not that grace is confined to the odd promise and word just here and there in the passage. The whole passage bears testimony like the whole scripture bears testimony to the heartbreaking love and commitment of God overcoming our evil, seeking to establish the blessing that we lost.

And I think there are two points to this passage and I just want to warn you that it's a bit longer than the normal sermon. I think the pews in this church are made for 24-minute sermons.

I don't know whether you agree with that or not. This is 28 minutes. I'm not sure what to do about that. Maybe when I come to the end of the first point, I'll stop and see how you're going and we'll take a vote as to whether we should finish.

The problem is that there's just so much here and it's like a feast for us. So let me make my first point. The first point is very simple. God gives us less than we deserve.

[7 : 41] God passes sentence on each of the parties to sin, the serpent, the woman and the man, and so that the effects of their sin are now not just spontaneous but God stands behind them in a strange sort of way.

And in doing this, God pays us a remarkable dignity. We said to God, we don't want you. We want to play God. We want to decide what is right and wrong on our own terms.

And the dreadful truth is that God affords us the massive dignity and gives us what we choose. And in doing that, we find that our freedom actually becomes a tyranny to ourselves.

And each sentence is deeply personal and each sentence is shaped perfectly to each party. Let's look at the sentence on the serpent in verse 14, 15. The Lord God said to the serpent, because you have done this, curse to you above all cattle and above all wild animals.

Upon your belly you shall go, dust you shall eat, all the days of your life, and I'll put enmity between you and your woman and I want to come back and deal with the last part of that verse later. Snake wants to be God, wants to be the highest best, so he is cursed above all, humiliated to the point of eating dust.

[8 : 54] But the curse for the snake is a blessing for us. Do you notice that? See, a blessing is the potential for life and future.

And God takes that potential away from Satan and away from the snake. In other words, the rebellion of which Satan is the author will not endlessly reproduce itself.

But God's intention for creation remains. Very important, you see, Christianity is not a dualistic religion. We don't believe God is over here and Satan over here and they're kind of equal gods and

it's a toss-up as to who's going to win.

No, no, no. The promise of God here is that there will be ultimate triumph for himself. The point I want to make just right now is that even with the snake, God gives us less than we deserve. What about the woman in verse 16? To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.

[10:05] The results of sin affect the woman in her two key relationships with her children and with her husband. But again, what is remarkable is that God allows the ability to procreate, to continue.

Do you remember in chapter 1, this was the key blessing that God gave to man and to woman and God allows it to continue only now it comes with pain. The blessing itself becomes a burden.

That's why we live in such an ambiguous world. I don't know if you've ever thought about this. I mean, you look around yourself and everything in our world is ambiguous because God allows the good to continue but it's now disordered and changed.

I sit here Sunday mornings and I look up at this window. There is 11th century glass in that window. It's the most beautiful colour but it came from Coventry Cathedral and it was bombed during the Second World War and an enterprising Canadian saw the windows blew out, grabbed sacks of it and brought it back to Canada.

Don't tell anyone in Coventry but it's a great reminder, isn't it? It's very beautiful but it's a reminder of great sadness and people who've lost their lives. This window, which is also lovely, is a reminder of warfare.

[11:25] The plaques along here finish with, begin with a flower and end with a flower and in between are people who have died in the sake of the Gospel. It's the same in everything in life.

Everything good remains but it is disrupted. Even the closest relationships, the blessing of children remain but it comes through pain. And when God says, your desire shall be for your husband, he's not speaking about sexual desire.

He's speaking about the desire to control and dominate the husband. Let me show you this. Turn one page, chapter 4, the very next chapter, in verse 7.

God is speaking to Cain before Cain kills his brother and he says to Cain in verse 7, if you do well, will you not be accepted? If you do not do well, sin is couching at the door, its desire is for you, it's the same word as in 3, but you must master it and that's the same word as rule in chapter 3.

You see? Sin's desire is for Cain. It's not a sexual desire. The desire of sin is to master, to dominate Cain but Cain must master and dominate it.

[12:42] See what chapter 3 is saying? Here is the result of sin. It is the battle of the sexes. The woman will desire to master and to control but he will conquer and he will master.

It's an awful perversion of the unity and harmony in which God originally created us. She no longer wants to be united with her husband. She wishes to rule over him. He no longer wants to be united with his wife.

He wishes to master her with his muscular power. It's a massive shift. And that is why throughout history, the oppression and brutalising of women has usually come at the hands of their own husbands.

In every culture, it's the same blight. It doesn't matter how primitive or how sophisticated the culture. On Friday, the Vancouver Sun, front page, carried the story. 2,000 women gathered together. Indo-Canadian women speaking courageously about domestic violence as a result of the three brutal attacks that have happened in the last weeks. See, here is the thing, our family and our marriage and our children, this is the thing that ought to bring us the biggest joy.

[13:54] This is the thing that we put at the top of our priority list in time after time after time. But because we have played God, and because there's only room for one God in every family, we have created a fearful unhappiness, and families are ripped apart, and we wage warfare across gender lines, and it's the result of rebellion against God.

Because I reject God as my ultimate reference point, I become the ultimate reference point, you are a threat to me, and I'm insecure. And I think before we move on, it's very important to see that God does not command this terrible tyranny.

It's part of the death that follows the rejection of God. If you go to the New Testament, the New Testament teaches that Christian husbands and Christian wives ought to abandon their reach for empowerment.

They ought to abandon their rights and serve one another. It teaches Christian wives to submit to their husbands in love. It teaches Christian husbands to cherish their wives to the point of their own death, not to dominate and rule.

And the reason for that is because we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, who went to the cross, gave away his power. It's upside down from the way the world works. I just point out that part of the result of the fall is that husbands and wives and our rivals, brother, will now kill his brother as we'll see next week.

[15 : 31] And yet still God does not give us what we deserve. And the third sentence is passed on man. Verses 17 to 19, if you just allow your eyes to float down there.

Verse 17, God curses the ground, in toil you will eat, thorns and thistles, sweat of your face, you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

The alienation that we created through our sin is now written into the very fabric of creation. Instead of the garden springing fresh from the word, now the earth brings forth naturally weeds.

And every gardener knows the truth of this. Yes, we can grow the most beautiful and delicious things, but the weeds always win. And the work that God modelled in chapter 1, now becomes frustrated with sweat and pain and resistance.

Now life is no longer serving and just guarding the creation. Now it's a struggle with the ground. And it's a struggle, my brothers and sisters, that in the end we lose. We struggle with the dust and in the end we become dust.

[16 : 48] In the New Testament we are taught that the whole creation has somehow been caught up in Adam's sin. Nature itself doesn't remain intact. It has been changed.

It has been subjected to futility. It is in bondage to decay. Of course, how beautiful this is. I'm the only one in the church in the sunlight right now. There's great beauty and if you read the Psalms they celebrate and rejoice the great beauty that God has created.

But they also bear eloquent testimony to the disruption that is in creation. We do it. We turn gardens into deserts. We pollute and degrade and exploit.

At the end of verse 19 God finally states physical death is the result of sin. It's very important to us as Christians to understand this. See, every non-biblical system wants to somehow domesticate death and you sometimes hear people saying death is natural.

That is not the Bible view. Death is the result of sin. If Adam and Eve had not disobeyed the voice of God we would not have to experience death. Yet even though God tells us we will return to dust with each step he limits the damage of our sin.

[18 : 04] With each step he opens the possibility for goodness and he does not give us anywhere close to what we deserve. Now that's the end of the first point and I'm going to suggest we stand for 10 seconds just to stretch our legs.

Would you do that please? Thank you.

Please sit down. I hesitate to say this.

One of the very clever things about the way Cramner wrote the service in the Book of Common Prayer is that we strategically stand up and kneel down and sit down at different stages and it's a very clever way to keep us awake.

The first point is that God does not give us what we deserve but the second point is this. God gives us far more than we deserve and he does this in three ways.

[19 : 11] Let me move through them very quickly. Verse 21 He protects us with skins. The Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. There's something very sad and very beautiful about this.

God doesn't just turn his back on Adam and even walk away from them. God is committed to overcoming the very alienation that they are responsible for.

God remains committed to being our God despite our rejection of him. The way that he does this is he takes the initiative to cover our sin and to cover the results of our sin.

He doesn't turn the clock back. He doesn't override our decisions but he acts to cover our sin with a gift that is completely free and much, much more than we deserve.

That's the way God's grace works you see. And you notice of course there has to be the sacrifice of an animal for these skins to be produced. And I think it points to a greater sacrifice.

[20 : 18] A sacrifice that we're going to celebrate in the sacrament in just a moment. Where through the death of his son God clothes us in a perfect righteousness that is not our own and when

we begin when we put that robe on it begins to transform us and to cleanse us at the core of our being.

The robe that he gives us removes our alienation and the shame that we cannot remove and gives us far more than we desire or far more than we deserve. That's the first thing he does.

The second act of grace is banishing us from the garden. Let me just read these verses so they're in our minds. Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil.

Now lest he put forth his hand take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. Therefore the Lord sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he has taken.

And he drove out the man and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. Now at first sight I know this seems like punishment doesn't it?

[21 : 28] It seems like God is banishing us so we can't have access to the tree of life. God moves us out of the paradise that he built for us and you and I live our lives outside the garden which explains something of that homesickness that we all have.

And it means of course that every utopian ideal in this millennium or in any millennium God says no to. There is no way that we can break back into the garden.

We cannot at the same time play God and participate in life and take from the tree of life. We no longer walk in natural friendship with God we're alienated from him.

And any attempt to try and steal back in or to force our way back into the garden is blocked by a mighty cherubim with a flaming big sword. And this also is a mighty act of grace.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it. But God doesn't rip out the tree of life and burn it removing all hope forever. Instead he protects the tree so that he might bring us back into paradise without sin and without death.

[22 : 46] If Adam and Eve had been able to eat of the tree of life in their lost condition they would have been lost eternally. We would have been eternally alienated and lived under the curse.

God removes our access to the tree of life as an act of love for us so that we might come back into the garden made new new men new women and that is far more than we deserve.

The third act of grace which I think is the preeminent act is in verse 15 we go back to that verse.

God says to the serpent I will put enmity between you and the woman between your seed and her seed he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

To put enmity between the serpent and the woman means that God is going to change the religious affections of the woman and her children and her seed so that she will turn away from Satan and love God again.

See what God is doing? He's putting humanity on his side of the conflict with Satan. It's an act of stunning kindness. God has no reason to do it apart from his goodness and his grace.

[24 : 02] More than that God says I am so committed to this battle that this struggle which is going to be the fundamental storyline of history will come to its climax in two champions.

One is the serpent and one is the seed of woman and in that climactic battle the serpent's head will be bruised he'll be utterly defeated but in the process the seed of woman will bear a terrible price.

He too will be bitten and bruised on the heel. So you see now the way of God because of our sin is the way of suffering it's the way of death. It will be through the death of his son Eve's seed on the cross that will win the victory.

the weakness of death through that the power of Satan will be broken. Not through technology not through some social utopian reconstruction but through a mighty act of love that gives itself over to death for us.

Jesus appeared to destroy the works of the devil. He bruised the serpent's head and in doing so he allowed the serpent to sink his fangs into his heel and he drained all the venom that Satan has on the cross.

[25 : 24] And the New Testament says this Jesus partook of the same nature as us that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death that is the devil and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

It's wonderful isn't it? There's only one son of Eve who had no sin there's only one son who didn't try and play God but did the opposite he didn't count quality with God something to be grasped but he emptied himself and he was struck for us and because he was struck he has opened the gate that

the cherubim guards and he has granted us access to the tree of life in the paradise of God. I need to finish I want to finish with one thing about us and one thing about God firstly to do with us Genesis 3 teaches us that human nature cannot be changed except by a mighty miracle of God's grace human nature is not unlimited it's not potentially unbounded we were created for blessing by God within God's boundaries and moving outside those boundaries is the way of death and our nature cannot be changed it can be educated it can be sophisticated it can learn all sorts of manners but at its core human nature remains profoundly anti-God and anti-others and it requires the miracle of God's grace to bring washing and regeneration recreation and I say to you and I know most of us believe this the idea that we are essentially good in our nature is a dreadful lie it's a contradiction of scripture it's a mockery of the cross apart from Jesus Christ at the centre of our nature we are alienated from God and from each other and that came because we rejected his goodness and finally a little word about God I do hope you can see that every word in this chapter bears witness to the compassion and the kindness and the mercy and the grace and the love of God he does not give us what we deserve he gives us what we do not deserve through Adam's life death came to all through Christ's death life is now available to all and Genesis 3 I think leaves us in no doubt about the fact that the problem for us is so deep and so profound we must be born anew we don't turn over a new leaf as it were we need to be remade everything God does and everything he says demonstrates his commitment to overcoming our sin overcoming that alienation inviting us back into the paradise that he created for us so that we might walk with him and share with him the tree of life forever amen let's kneel for prayer thank you okay with you have a