

Freedom from the Curse

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[0 : 00] Do we still need Christmas? There are so many good things about Christmas, but they often bring out problems too. As a couple of people on the video said, it's such a great time to give gifts. And I love giving gifts to my kids, but the flip side of that is I see their struggle thinking this season is all about getting presents. And they struggle and wrestle with selfishness. Another person said on the video how much they love celebrating Christmas with family. And I love celebrating Christmas with family, but there is always pain with those who are not there. And family gatherings can be such a breeding ground for conflict and division. Old hurts rising to the surface. Even just yesterday, we were setting up our Christmas tree, put the decorations up, and it was all looking pretty good so far. I know it's Christmas when our Christmas-themed coffee mugs come out, so I had a really big one this morning. But even yesterday, conflict over who got to put the star on the top of the tree. What should be a good thing can bring out pain and conflict. And right now, at this point, on the 1st of December,

I don't hate Christmas carols. But I can imagine when it's the 24th of December, and I've just started my Christmas shopping, it's going to be a little different. I've been hunting around in 30 different shops looking for a very specific robot dinosaur for one of my children. And I finally found it, and I'm standing in the line at the checkout, and it's 40 minutes deep. And I'm just hearing those same Christmas songs on loop. And it's grating. And it brings outrage at those songs, and impatience and anger towards everyone else. This season of Christmas has so much promise.

We have this hope that Christmas will be a wonderful time, but it can also bring out the worst in us. Would it just be better if we cancelled Christmas, save some money, save some pain?

Why do we still need Christmas? That is the question that we are seeking to answer all throughout December. And as we seek to answer this, we're going to be looking at a couple parts of the Old Testament, the prophecies that are pointing to Jesus' coming. And then we're going to have a look at the story of Jesus' birth in the book of Luke. But today, we're starting in Genesis 3. We're going back to the root of all of our problems. And this also points to how our problems are fixed at Christmas.

So, to understand Christmas, we're going to go back to the very start of the Bible, to the start of when the whole world was made. So please have your Bibles open at Genesis 3. Genesis 1 and 2 tells us the story in Hebrew poetry of how God made the universe, how he made earth and us humans in God's image. And then Genesis 3 shows this all fall apart.

[3 : 19] God made men and women and they were united and they had no shame. They followed God with no fear. And then the serpent, the deceiver, comes and questions Adam and Eve. Have a look with me at Genesis 3, verse 1.

Now, the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

The woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it or you will die. Adam and Eve who were united, Adam likely nearby, are about to be divided.

Eve twists God's word and she remembers it incorrectly. God didn't actually command that they weren't allowed to touch the tree. And the serpent suggests an alternate gospel.

A good news, not based on obeying God in his love, but one that would make them like God through disobedience. Verse 4. You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

[4 : 40] You can be like God, not by following God and obeying him, but by disobeying him. On the back of the handouts, when we came in, you can read about what the gospel is, the good news is,

but here, Satan is suggesting his own version of the good news. Disobeying God to become like him.

And so Adam and Eve, they both disobey God and in an instant, the perfect garden is destroyed. The garden where husband and wife were perfectly united, that's destroyed. They're no longer united.

Our God is no longer obeyed as the perfect and generous God. Work is no longer a good gift. A small, weak moment of disobedience causes thousands of years of devastation and destruction. Verse 7. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. They were united and comfortable, naked in the presence of each other.

Naked in both the literal sense and in the sense that they were completely open and knowable to the other person. But immediately after they have sinned, they are aware of the nakedness between each other and they seek to hide their shame.

[6 : 04] They make coverings. Their marriage is broken. They can't stand the sight of each other. They can't be vulnerable and open with each other. In this moment, not only is their perfect relationship destroyed, so too with God.

No longer close and obedient to their God. Now they see God as a tyrant to be feared. They run and hide behind a tree, which was supposed to be beautiful and fruitful for them.

But now they are hiding behind a good gift from God. And God comes calling to them. And only selfishness is seen. Verse 9. The Lord God called to the man, Where are you?

He answered, I heard you in the garden, And I was afraid because I was naked, So I hid. I heard. I was afraid. I was naked.

I hid. Adam plunges himself into selfishness. Revealing the heart of his problem. His disobedience.

[7 : 13] Causing him to feel shame at his nakedness. And so God, knowing what's happened, asks, Oh, how did you know you were naked? And Adam's selfishness and desire to protect himself makes him blame Eve and God in the one breath.

Verse 12. The man said, The woman you put me here with, She gave me some fruit from the tree, And I ate it. Now I think this is a lot to do for Adam in one breath.

He blames both God and the woman in one go. The woman you put here with me. God, this is your fault and it's her fault.

And he shifts the blame to somebody else out of fear to protect himself. The woman, Eve, does the same thing in verse 13. Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done?

The woman said, The serpent deceived me and I ate. Again, she shifts the blame. She doesn't admit fault. Can you imagine how God would have felt in this moment?

[8 : 18] I've given you this good gift. And now you three, the serpent, Adam and Eve, Now you are fighting and blaming each other. I've given you everything.

And this is how you respond? God can't let this act of disobedience go on punishment. And so he curses the snake and sets consequences for Adam and Eve.

Verse 14. So the Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock, And all wild animals.

You will crawl on your belly, And you'll eat dust all the days of your life. Down to verse 16. To the woman he said, I'll make your pains in childbearing very severe. With painful labor you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you. To Adam, Cursed is the ground because of you, Though through painful toil, You will eat food from it all the days of your life.

[9 : 15] The united and perfect relationship is no more. This man and this woman, They were created equal, But now she will long for her husband's position of authority.

And because man is now sinful, He will abuse and exploit his position of authority. These two who were created to be one flesh, And now tearing each other apart. Those who had no shame before each other, They can't stand the sight of each other.

They're both selfishly protecting themselves, And blaming others for their actions. Work that God had given them, As a good gift is now toil.

Man who had come from the dust, Is going to toil in the dust, Till he goes back to the dust. Instead of finding fulfillment in God, Together they've chased other things, Trying to rule over each other, And it is a mess.

Work is damaged, Relationship with each other is damaged, Relationship with God is damaged. The consequences of this moment, Just ripple throughout human history.

[10 : 24] People chasing knowledge and power for themselves, Not taking responsibility, But shifting blame, Fear leading to damaging people, That are the closest to you, Power plays, This is every drama, In movie and TV.

But it's also the drama, Of our lives. We relate to each other, From places of sinful fear, And anxiety, Causing us to defend ourselves, And not admit fault.

Not secure in the unending love, Of God as his children, We're tempted by more, And when we're caught out, We shift blame, We care about only ourself.

It causes problems, At Christmas, Because our desires, Are so often clear, At Christmas time. You just think of the kid, Who opens the present, On Christmas morning, And it's not the right colour, They will tell you, I wanted the purple one, Not the pink one.

The heart is so clear. We, On the other side, We want someone to, We give them a gift, And we want to see, How joyful, And how much gratitude, They have.

[11 : 41] And so we have, A sinful response as well. How come you're not, More thankful? I spent \$15, On that present. We want our family, To be happy. These are good desires, To have.

But so often, Our good desires, Especially at Christmas, Get expressed selfishly. So what do we do? Christmas is, Only 24 sleeps away.

Should we just get, Rid of Christmas? How does God, Speak into this season, And guide us through it? Well let's see, What God's solution is, To this issue of selfishness, And disobedience, And blame shifting.

He's going to cover, Over their shame, And promise a solution. It seems that, A terrible wedge, Would have been driven, Between God, And his people at this point.

But God is still, Amazingly compassionate, And loving, And caring. He is still a, Compassionate creator God. Verse 21, The Lord God, Made garments of skin, For Adam, And his wife, And clothed them.

[12 : 50] God meets his, Ashamed, And guilty people, In their need. He provides, He provides covering, For them, More effective, Than the leaves.

Animals are sacrificed, To cover their shame, And disgrace. One has died, To cover their sin. These people, Who were united, Following God, Divided from each other now, But God has covered them.

God's provision, Allows them to stand, Before each other. God is still for them. He has not separated himself, From his damaged creation.

He hasn't gone, Oh, Well you guys ate, From the wrong tree. I'm out of here. No, He is still, Caring. He separated from the tree, Separated them from the tree of life, Because they've, Eaten of the tree of good and evil.

If they ate from the tree of life, They would be stuck, In eternal life, In sin. So he separates them, As an act of grace, But he doesn't separate himself.

[13 : 59] He is still present, Despite all that we do, Our God is still present, And he compassionately cares, For Adam and Eve, In their fear, In their anxiety, And in their shame. He allows them, To continue in relationship, Now that they're covered up.

But they are not whole. Their clothes point, To the distance, Between themselves, And God. But God is still working, To see, Their relationship restored.

God has made a way, For them to continue, In the short term, But he also promises, A final solution. When God cursed the snake, He also promised, That someone would come, And deal with this problem.

Verse 15, And this has got to be, One of my favorite parts, Of the Bible. Verse 15, And I will put enmity, Between you and the woman, And between your offspring, And hers, He will crush your head, And you will strike his heel.

God promises, A head crusher. He promises to Adam and Eve, That one day, One of their children would come, And crush the snake's head. To right the wrong, That has caused so much devastation.

[15 : 09] And it points to a day, That the one who was instrumental, In the fall, Would be crushed. And so when Jesus comes, And he defeats sin, Death, And the devil, He is crushing, Its head on the cross, And in his resurrection.

And yet as promised, That the snake would strike his heel, Jesus is struck, He is crucified. But he is raised by God, Enthroned as the long expected, Snake crusher, And king.

He died, And he was raised, Ruling at God's right hand. And he will return, To take us with him. So how does God fix these, Issues of sin, And selfishness, And blame shifting?

Well Christmas, Is the ultimate display, Of other person centered love. It's the opposite of selfishness. God gives, His one and only son, Who was mistreated, And killed, But raised.

His death, And resurrection, Defeat Satan, But also, Provide a covering for us. God's generous gift, Covers us, Not just our skin, But our guilt, And our shame, And our, All of our problems.

[16:31] Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' righteousness, Is the cover, For our sinfulness. As Adam and Eve's clothes, Cover their shame, And fear, And anxiety, So they could continue together, God does the same for us.

Jesus, Is our covering, So we can stand before God, In his sight. And we no longer need to be afraid, Or to run off and hide behind a tree, Like Adam and Eve tried to.

We no longer need to stand, Like Adam and Eve, Shifting blame, Out of self-protection. Jesus' blood, Protects us. And we are forgiven and loved.

So, It's 2019, It's another Christmas, Coming very soon. Why do we still need Christmas? Well, Genesis 3 reminds us of what we are like.

We're inherently selfish, We're worried about protecting ourselves, We shift blame to others, We pursue wisdom and knowledge, And satisfaction, In all the wrong ways, That damage us.

[17:39] And we can be tricked, Into ignoring or twisting, God's words to us. So, I need, Christmas this year. I need it when it, It brings out that default, Selfish response.

Because I can get, Tricked into thinking that Christmas, Is, Is just about food, And presents. And we plan so much of our year, And so much of the month, About Christmas day.

You know, It can just be about family, And food. And I can get tricked, Into thinking that, That's all Christmas is. I can get, Selfish and impatient, Blaming others, For doing their shopping, At the last minute, And getting in my way, When I'm doing shopping, At the last minute.

I really, I really shouldn't do that, Now that I've said this, So far in advance. I can forget, Christmas is about, The God who gave us, The best gift. His son, Who entered the world, To save us.

I think Christmas, Is God's best, On display. His generosity, To us, In his only son. His grace, Giving us, What we don't deserve.

[18:45] This mercy, That he would cover, Our sin, And shame, With his son's blood, On the cross. We need Christmas, Now, In 2019, To remember, God's, Present goodness, His love for us, In Jesus.

And how, He is uniting, A diverse community, In Jesus. What was, Divided at the fall, He is, Reuniting, In Jesus.

We need, This Christmas, More than, Anything else, Right now. Because we all, Need to remember, God's, Goodness to us, In his son. And expect, Our God, To work, In our hearts too. Now, Instead of letting, A busy, And expect, Expensive, And tiring, Christmas, Season, Bring you down, Remember, All that God, Has done. All God, Has done, Since Adam and Eve, Through Jesus, And he, Continues to do, Today.

Over, The next couple of weeks, As the, The Christmas season, Gets upon us, Use this season, To remind you, Of why we still need, Christmas. When you're, Buying gifts, Remember that, It's not about, Whatever present, We are buying, But the God, Who gave us, The snake crusher, To deal with sin, Death, And the devil.

[20:05] In the midst, Of painful times, With family, Remember all that, God has done, To cover our sin, And shame, And mistakes, So that Jesus' blood, Covers our sin, But also, Reunites us, With people.

Now imagine, That it's Christmas Eve, I'm down there, At Westfield, Chatswood, I'm stuck in that line, With a trolley of presents, Last minute gifts, I'll be tempted, To feelings of impatience, And anger, You know, I'm going to be late, For our, Christmas Eve service, Probably, You know, Standing there frustrated, At everyone else, Listening to those, Christmas carols, Thinking, Why, Why am I here?

Why do I even, Still need Christmas? What a great chance, For me, And for us, In these, Challenging times, That lead us, To selfishness, To be reminded, That God has planned out, Jesus' moment of salvation, Not the last minute, But since, The world began, Since before that, God

doesn't get impatient, Or angry with me, Or us, But he has covered, Over our sin, And our
impatience, And anger, He has clothed me, Not with the skin of animals, For a short time, But he
has clothed me, With his son, And with his son's righteousness, So why, Do we still need
Christmas?
Because we still need, God's goodness to us, In Jesus. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father,