

Paradise Lost

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It'd be great if you could keep your Bibles open there. I'm actually going to be going through to verse 9 this morning, so you'll need it in front of you when I look at that.

But also the St. Paul's app has got an outline. Four points this morning, and that's our journey as we continue on into Genesis.

This is, if you're new with us today, we are looking at the beginning of all things. It's just a framework, the foundation of the Christian faith, and in particular, not just the beginning of creation, but the beginning of our knowledge of God.

Genesis fundamentally is about who God is, and they're from that how we come to understand ourselves. So let me pray as we launch in. Gracious God, we are grateful for what we have been engaging with in your word.

In a world that looks at all the details around us and causes elements of anxiety to arise in us with a great deal of uncertainty about the future of the world in which we live, there are so many things that trouble us.

[1 : 14] You're a God who exists outside of your creation. You never had a beginning. You never had an end. You're everlasting to everlasting. You are God, and you're a God who sovereignly rules and ordains and controls all things, even if we don't understand it.

Help us to lean into you, the majestic, beautiful, good God. And so today, as we open this word, change our hearts and our minds, help us to see the issues that are fundamental in each one of our lives, but help us to see you a good and a great God as well and how you've resolved those issues for us.

For those of us who have taken this journey, been following you for many years, we come to texts like this knowing how it all plays out.

Lord, break through that rut now so that we might see you in newer ways, in clearer ways, in majestic ways.

Amen. On the 21st of April, 1970, Leonard Casey, a Western Australian farmer, withdrew from Australia and set up his own micronation.

[2 : 32] His 75 square kilometre farm, 517 kilometres north of Perth, became known as Hutt River Province.

He withdrew from Australia because of an ongoing dispute about wheat production, particularly with the Western Australian government about wheat production. So Leonard Casey became known as His Majesty, Prince Leonard I of Hutt, and then granted royal titles to the rest of his farming family. It produced, over time, it produced its own currency, its stamps and its passport, none of which was recognised by any government in the world. In fact, someone was arrested in Germany in the 1980s using a Hutt River Province passport for entry into Germany.

Now, what followed for Leonard, Leo, was years and years of legal disputes until, on the 2nd of December, 1977, Casey had had enough and he declared war on Australia.

Baffling, really. But he notified the authorities of Australia three days later that he was ceasing hostilities against Australia.

[3 : 57] He withdrew his declaration of war because, frankly, no one turned up. And so he moved on. In 2017, after 45 years, sitting on his self-styled throne, Prince Leonard stepped down as ruler.

His youngest son, Graham, took the throne as the new ruler, inherited Hutt River Province, as well as his dad's \$2.5 million of debt to the Australian Taxation Office.

On the 3rd of August, 2020, the Principality of Hutt River Province was formally dissolved. The Principality's land was sold off in 2021 to settle an ongoing legal debt of more than \$2.7 million.

So Hutt River Province was this... It, in fact, became quite a popular tourist attraction mainly because they wanted to visit the nutjob who did this.

And so it was a spurious attempt by Leonard Casey to evade laws and responsibilities that he did not agree with, primarily with the Australian government but ultimately with the federal government. [5 : 18] From the moment he declared independence, his life started to decline. Ongoing legal battles, mounting debts, conflicts.

And now Hutt River Province doesn't even exist. Doesn't even exist. The core problem that saw the creation of Hutt River Province, the core problem for Leonard Casey and the core problem for you and me and all the humanity finds its origin in what was just read out to us by Anne in Genesis chapter 3.

The issues of our world are very obvious. I don't need to unpack that for you at all. I mean, open the newspaper, turn on the TV or just spend a quiet half an hour or so with your own heart and mind. Every worldview has to account for the world in which we live in some way. And this is the Christian account. This is a Christian account.

Does it fit with our experience of the world? So, if you've got the St. Paul's app, you'll see four points there. The first point is the mock.

[6 : 40] Genesis 3 starts with a mock, hidden as a question. Verse 1, So here, the rest of the Bible tells us what we have here is we have Satan speaking through the serpent.

Now, we've got probably a heap of bunch of questions about that. But this text is primarily about us and how we got to be the way we are. The fall of the human race does not start with an action. It starts with an attitude. It starts with a desire. It starts with a scoff. It starts with a mock. It starts with a roll of the eyes. The key to understanding what this verse is about is the word really.

It's a word that in actual fact is translated as indeed. Did God indeed say?

The serpent is not so much denying what God has said, he's in fact rolling his eyes at what God has said. He's mocking what God has said. He isn't saying God didn't say it.

[8 : 07] He's saying, I can't believe God said that. It's a joke. Surely God did not really say that. It's a statement.

It's not a question. Come on, Eve. Come on. Get with the times, Eve. This is the year one. I mean, get with the modern times. Surely you don't believe that stuff anymore.

He's trying to change, ultimately, Adam and Eve's attitude towards God's word. The fall of the human race starts with an attitude of the heart.

This happens more often than not in our modern world. Very rarely does anyone lose God through an argument.

They lose him through an attitude or through an atmosphere. An atmosphere. When the consistent voice of culture across every platform says that Christianity is not reasonable, it's not relevant for a modern era or even dangerous, then there's an atmosphere that we breathe each day.

[9 : 25] It's subtle. Very rarely do you ever engage with a full frontal attack on the Christian faith in terms of its logic.

What we're confronted with consistently from children's TV through to comedians and in the media and is the mock, the joke, the pithy one-liners that seem reasonable but actually make no sense at all if you spend time unpacking them.

And it is overwhelming the atmosphere that we breathe. For every argument against the Christian faith, there would have to be more than 99 mocks, scoffs, sneers.

None of those 99 mocks and sneers and scoffs are themselves an argument in any way whatsoever. However, they're not rational in any way whatsoever.

A mock is a mere assertion trying to create an atmosphere of doubt and defence. It is not an argument in itself.

[10 : 47] They need to give an argument as to why they think the Christian faith is not reasonable, relevant and good and very rarely do you ever hear it. Even the great secular debaters of this era, very rarely will any of them endure an entire debate without getting personal, without scoffing in some way, without taking, ridiculing their opponent, their Christian opponent in some way.

Be careful, Christian, not to fight fire with fire and use the same techniques back. Now, we're not told here how long Adam and Eve deliberated after being targeted by the serpent.

But surely the atmosphere was created. They were torn. They were confused. They were disorientated. I wonder when the mocking of the serpent started to prompt in them quiet whispers of

worthlessness, of alienation, of questioning, of confusion, of disorientation, of purposelessness. I wonder how long it took for fear and desperation to start setting in. It started with just a mock. Just a mock.

Then comes the lie. What follows the attitude of the heart is a lie for the mind. Chapter 3, verse 2. [12:31] 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.

And then here comes the lie, verse 4. You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened. You see, the serpent's message here, the undercurrent of the message is, if you will obey God, it will truly ruin your life.

He doesn't want you to eat of the tree because it will open up for you a whole new avenue of looking at the world, whole new opportunities for you.

Satan is trying to get into Adam and Eve's mind and heart and our mind and heart that if you obey God, you will ruin your life.

You will miss out on life. If you obey God, you will not be happy. If you obey God, you'll be held back. You will not realise yourself. You will be oppressed. You will be miserable.

[13:41] You see, Satan knows just how to destroy. Notice in the arguments here, notice he does not start with, get a platform up, let's have a debate about the existence of God.

That's not where he's starting at all. Doesn't start with the existence of God. It's pretty obvious. I mean, they actually were walking with him yesterday. He doesn't go after the word of God, the will of God, the perfection of God.

What he goes after is the goodness of God. The very first lie is about the goodness of God. And the love and the grace and the goodwill behind every single one of the commands of God.

He is getting them here to doubt God's goodwill. He is getting them to distrust God. And that lie went in deep. Adam and Eve were targeted.

They were deceived. They were gaslit. And they were harmed. And in targeting God's goodness, the serpent also targeted their own glory as bearers of the image of God.

[14:54] didn't just attack God from outside. He attacked them from the inside. And that lie of the serpent is deep in the heart of every human being.

It's a lie that causes us to question the goodness of God. And his goodness behind every single one of his commands. You see, this gets worked out in various ways for us.

The religious moralist lives a life of legalistic restraint in order to earn salvation through their upright life and good deeds. Ultimately, they do not trust the grace and the goodness of God to do it for them.

The religious moralist does not trust in the goodness of God. The rebel liberalist pursues a life of free abandon because they do not trust the goodness and the grace of God and that following him is in fact the best life.

Totally different ways to respond to the exact same lie. The lie that God is not good. That he's holding out on you. That he wants to ruin your life.

[16:18] And humanity's life has been ruined by embracing the lie. Going to impact next week more of how we see that in every sphere of life.

So that brings us to... First, there's an attitude of the heart. Then there's a life of the mind. And this leads to the tree and the act of the will.

Have a look at verse 6. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. I'm not unpacking this but just in the last week I've been reflecting what...

what was happening in the heart, the emotions of both Adam and Eve that they would look at that tree and they would want that more than the God that they walked with day by day.

[17:31] How destroyed internally were they to actually reach out and grab at that point? Just the thought that I'm reflecting on.

They're in paradise. It's perfect. They can do anything except eat from the tree, this particular tree. So what's the big deal about the tree and what kind of fruit was it?

You know, as you're walking through Harris Farm. Hmm. You know, it could be a choco. My experience is it probably was a choco if you've ever eaten one of those things.

But the point here is, I say that as a joke, don't take that as a note by the way. There's no Hebrew translation of choco here at all. Let me just...

What's the big deal about the tree? What's so bad about the fruit? What if God had given Adam and Eve an explanation so he knew which fruit not to order on Woolworths or Coles?

[18 : 35] If he had some... What if God had said to them... What if God had said to them that if you from this tree...

If you eat from this tree, you'll be suffering hardship and broken relationships and disease for the rest of human history? What if he had said that?

What if he had said that if you do eat for the tree, your life in every sphere will be ruined? They might have walked away. They might have walked away.

Here's a taste for you. Let me just show you. They might have walked away. The reason why God didn't give them an explanation is absolutely crucial to why this command is so important.

The reason why we know nothing about what is significant about this tree or what kind Fruto is, it helps us understand why this command is so significant. If he had given them an explanation and they walked away, they'd be walking away because it would be cost-benefit analysis.

[19 : 47] That's the reason they'd walk away. It's not worth my time. It's not worth my future. It's not worth ruining my life to eat of this tree.

That's not obedience. That's religion. It's cost-benefit analysis. And that would be they would not eat of the tree out of self-interest.

And they would still be in the driver's seat of their life. God wanted Adam and Eve to live as if he was God. They were made in his image.

They'd been given the gift of life was spoilt. And I use that term in a positive way, spoilt with the abundance of Eden. And he wanted them to live by his power and under his authority.

Their lives, the world that they inhabited, was all a gift. None of it was a possession for them to do as they pleased.

[20 : 53] And so God simply said, do not eat of the tree. That one. Don't eat of that one. And with that command, they can choose to live with God as God or themselves as God.

It's just as simple as that. The serpent knows this because he suggests that they take the tree and you will be like God.

It is so essential that we look beyond the rules like the Ten Commandments and others that we see and see that there is a key reason for every single one of them.

And the key is this. God is God and you are not. Do not put yourself in the place of God.

Obey him simply because he is God. God. Every single thing that is wrong with us in this world is linked to the root issue of putting ourselves in the place of God.

[22 : 01] Now that's pretty obvious the big stuff like murder. It's me playing God over another human being. It's me taking a life. But what about all the other things? What about anxiety? Some of us are eaten up by worry in life.

Why? For me personally that is I have an idea of how my relationship should go.

I have an idea of how church should go. How my health should go. How my plans should go. And there are times I'm not fully confident that the sovereign God who brought everything into being is over it all.

Because the lie runs deep in my heart. God you know if you're good I think you do it this way not that way. I put myself in the place of God.

Mistrust puts me in the place of God. What about grudges? If you don't forgive someone it's because you are taking God's place again. We think we know what a person deserves.

[23 : 08] We think we have the right to ensure that they get what they deserve. That's me on the throne of my life again. How is it possible that I could ever know the depths of another person's mind and heart when I don't even know my own?

All of our problems stem from us taking God's place. And this fundamentally is just choosing to obey or not.

choosing to obey God or not on the basis of whether I think it makes sense or not.

William W. Borden was the heir of a wealthy Chicago family. I've mentioned him, this guy, in the past. In 1904 and 1905 at the age of 16 he travelled the world.

And this was followed by a brilliant career at Yale and then Princeton Seminary where he committed his life to seeking to win Muslims in China to Jesus.

[24 : 22] In 1903, sorry, 1913, sorry, at the age of 25 he left for Egypt and he never looked back. Before he left, Borden gave away \$800,000 in his day, which is equivalent to over \$20 million today.

That was his own portion that he'd accumulated in the vast family wealth. He gave it away to charitable missions everywhere and he went to Egypt.

Egypt. He did not know at that point, at the age of 25, it was the final year of his life. In Cairo, he contracted cerebral meningitis and died.

His mother was on her way to Cairo to have a holiday with him, but instead she arrived just in time to bury him. It is said that she found his Bible as she cleaned up his things and in his Bible were the words, no reserve, written, no reserve.

And the date he wrote it, it suggests that he's been written shortly after he renounced his fortune and gave it away to missions. Later, he was said to have written, no retreat.

[25 : 48] retreat. And the date of that no retreat was after his father told him that he would never hold a position in the family business from here on in.

And finally, shortly before he died in Egypt, and it's believed to be the last words he ever wrote, no regrets.

No regrets. Why did he not write, what are you doing, God?

I mean, can't you see everything I've done for you? Here I am in Egypt looking to go into the mission field to extend your kingdom. What are you doing after everything I've done for you?

Why did he not write that? It's because he didn't obey God for reputation. He did not obey God for results. He did not obey God for impact. He obeyed God because God is God.

[26 : 53] And he wasn't. At least in this instance, Borden disbelieved the lie that you cannot trust God. Let me say as a side point, he ended up inspiring thousands of people to become missionaries in the generations that followed.

He never knew that on his deathbed. Through his death, he's had significant impact in the lives of thousands, if not millions.

So Adam and Eve took the fruit, setting course of human history a distrust of God. So friends, hear this.

what your and mine, what our hearts desire, the mind justifies and our will's action.

In the final verses of this section, we see the rest of humanity and human history in summary form. Verses eight and nine. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord among the trees of the garden.

[28 : 15] But the Lord God, called out to the man, where are you? There's a couple of things I want to point out here. The first thing is Adam and Eve went into hiding the moment they rejected God.

They went into hiding. The consequence of not trusting in the goodness of God is we hide. And I'm going to unpack this a little bit more next week.

We hide from our true selves. We can't stand an honest review of ourselves. If it wasn't for verse eight, therapy in our world would not exist. We need therapy because we're constantly hiding from ourselves.

Most significantly though here is we hide from God. In the presence of God, we cannot hide who we truly are. And so we must hide.

It's not just hiding from consequences, it's hiding from ourselves and God reveals who we truly are. We hide from our true selves, we hide from God and we hide from others.

[29 : 25] The second thing to notice and the most remarkable thing is that while we are running and hiding, God is searching. He's calling out to us.

It is our nature to hide from God and God's nature is to seek us. God calls it out. Where are you? Is God like literally right, but can't find Adam and Eve?

Where are they? You know, we're playing hide and seek. How is it possible that an all-knowing, sovereign, omniscient God who knows every blade of grass that grows and every bird, how does he not know where they are?

Of course he knows where they are. He's pursuing them is what he's doing. He's telling Adam and Eve, I'm coming for you.

I'm here still. he's calling out to them. He's engaging them. He's reconnecting with them.

[30 : 35] He's pursuing them. What we need to realize is that if we ever find God, in fact, one of the first things you discover is that it's because he was becoming after me.

He had already found me. He found me first. And we see this in the Bible from beginning to end. He is so, so good. Despite our rejection of him, he comes after us.

And we see the ultimate expression of God coming after us, reconnecting with us, pursuing us, engaging with us, is when God the Son himself took on human flesh and descended into our world to come after us.

We're going to see this in the coming weeks, but ultimately it is Jesus Christ who stomps on the head of the serpent and crushes the lie, gets rid of the mock.

He is the one who defeats the serpent. So reading back into these verses, we see how Jesus turns it all around. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent lured Adam and Eve to ignore the command of God about the tree.

[31 : 53] Centuries later, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane struggling with the command of God about another tree, a wooden cross, a cross cut from a tree. Adam and Eve were told not to take of the tree.

Jesus is commanded here to embrace the tree. Get nailed to the tree. Adam and Eve ignored the command in the hope of a blessed life but instead got cursed.

Jesus Christ obeyed the command knowing that he would receive our curse for ignoring God's command about the tree. The curse of separation from God so that we could receive the blessing of being brought back into relationship with God.

Adam and Eve were in a beautiful garden and God said, if you obey me about the tree, you would live and live and live but they didn't. Jesus is in the darkness of the garden and his father said to him, if you obey me about the tree, you will die.

You will die. You will be crushed. You will be cursed. and he did. He did. He obeyed and he obeyed for you and for me who deserve to be crushed, who deserve to be destroyed, who deserve to be cursed.

[33 : 17] He embraced the tree of death and turned it into a tree of life for us. Jesus is the one who reverses the sin of the tree. The sin of us where only God deserves to be.

That's the Christian gospel. That's the core of the Christian faith. The tree of salvation is God putting himself where only we deserve to be on a cross of condemnation and curse.

So when Jesus obeyed the father about the tree, he also crushed the lie of Satan. He crushed the lie that we cannot trust God.

You want to look at the goodness of God? See him hanging on a cross for you. No more evidence is required than that. The only way to overcome the lie that God is not trustworthy is to see this God descending into his world, climbing the tree of death and turning that into a tree of life for us.

It's the only way to overcome the lie. this is the only thing that will day by day take the poison of the lie out of our hearts, out of our minds and our attitudes that God is not good and that trusting in him is unreasonable and it's irrelevant for our day or that God is not good.

[34 : 49] Jesus on the cross deals with the mock, the lie and the lie about the tree. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.