

Paradise Promised

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[0:00] H.G. Wells was an English writer, quite popular in the end of the 19th century and the mid-20th century. He was prolific. He wrote in many different genres. He wrote more than 50 novels, dozens of short stories, such as *The War of the Worlds* turned into a classic movie with Tom Cruise back in the day. He started life as someone who was, in his own words, sympathetic towards God and religion, but he ended life as an atheist. He started life hopeful, but ended life actually quite depressed and despondent. In his short *History of the World*, which is quite an ironic statement, title for a book, quite a bold and ambitious thing actually, *Short History of the World*, he wrote, can we doubt that presently our race will more than realise our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, and that our children will live in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden than we know, going on from strength to strength in ever widening circle of achievement. What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state, form but a prelude to the things that man has yet to do. That's written in 1937. Nine years later, after the awful carnage of

World War II, and just before he died, in fact, this book was published just after he died, he wrote this. This is his final work. The cold-blooded massacre of the defenceless, the return of deliberate and organised torture, mental torment, the fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished. Nine years later, from hope, the world is only improving, improving, improving, to this is the end of all things. It's hard to avoid the conclusion, which is what we've been looking at here in the book of Genesis, that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world in which we live.

Every worldview, every philosophy must come to terms with the experience of life in this world, and the difficulty of the experience of life in this world. According to the Christian faith, as we've been looking at in the book of Genesis, our biggest problem is what the Bible calls sin. That is the linchpin of what is wrong with our world. Last week, we saw how sin entered the world through the rejection of God. And what we're doing today, and what we're doing next week, is we're hanging around this chapter a little bit to look at what the results of sin are in our world and in our lives, and what God does about it. And so if you've got the St. Paul's app, there's really two points today, with a couple of sub-points, just to expand it a little bit. But really, it's just the curse and the blessing. The curse of sin, as we see in the Bible, has touched every aspect of life. It is comprehensive in the way that life has been transformed. There's not a single aspect of life that is beyond the reach of sin and its consequences. And so I really want to look at four consequences really briefly, without unpacking them too much, four consequences of sin that we see in the verses that were just read out for us. The first thing that happens when God is disobeyed is Adam and Eve are cut off from God. They experience the curse of spiritual alienation. We looked at this last week, we're going to do it again, verse 8.

Now, walking is a Hebrew idiom. It's an idiom for fellowship. It's an idiom for friendship. It's an idiom for closeness and intimacy. And this is what they had with God before sin entered the world. And now they are hiding from God. We see it in the prophets. We see it in the New Testament with Peter.

[5:07] Peter, when they are in the presence of God, they want God to leave. They want God to go. They cannot be coping with the presence of God. They are terrified. They can't stand. They are overwhelmed.

They can't look at God. Now, of course, in our world, not everyone feels this sense of alienation from God. That is mainly because anyone in our world who does not know the God of the Bible and his grace and his mercy in Jesus, what has happened is we've created gods in our own image.

Sort of like if you watch The Simpsons for too long at all, and you will find the cartoon God of The Simpsons, a God who is powerless, a God who just does not want to be disturbed, who wants to be kind of separated from the irreligion and the religion of the world, a God who's disconnected, a God who simply shrugs his shoulders and tolerates our views and our lives. And occasionally when he gets disturbed, he just gets cranky and throws the odd lightning bolts here and there and so on. That's the kind of God that we have in our mind. And so we don't feel alienated from that God because it's a God that we've made.

The Bible tells us that we are alienated from the God who creates, the God who defines, the God who sustains all things, including our very lives. The second thing that happens when God is disobeyed is that we are cut off from our self. So spiritual alienation, alienation from God, leads to personal alienation or psychological alienation. We do not know our true self.

Notice the contrast with Genesis 2.25, which says Adam and Eve were both naked and they felt no shame.

[7 : 16] Shame. Shame is an internal uneasiness that's at the centre of the self.

The minute we lost God, there was a dislocation with the self. The consequence of sin is that we are no longer easy with who we are.

Sin causes every single person to have a deep sense of inadequacy. When we lose God, we lose ourselves. And the great John Calvin, the theologian, a church reformer, said that we cannot know ourself.

We cannot contemplate who we are unless we have first contemplated and gazed upon who God is. With the loss of God comes a loss of identity and the drive to cover up that deep inadequacy that we feel.

There is not a single person alive who believes that they are entirely okay. Not a single person. Other people and circumstances in life might aggravate our sense of inadequacy, but they are never the cause of it.

[8 : 44] They are never the cause of our inadequacy. Spiritual alienation leads to psychological alienation. The third thing that happens when God is disobeyed, for Adam and Eve here, is they are cut off from others.

So spiritual alienation leads to psychological alienation, which leads to social alienation. Back to chapter 3, verse 7. That is, they are not just hiding from God and they are not just trying to hide from themselves, but they are hiding from each other.

Sin, this is very general terms, but sin is the source of every single personal relationship problem. Every single one of them. If we cannot be utterly transparent with God, then we cannot be utterly transparent with another human being. And unless we are resting deep in our hearts in the assurance that God delights in us, despite all of our flaws and inadequacies, then we move into every single relationship desperate for the approval of others.

And we sit in the process. Gossip comes from a deep sense of inadequacy in me, and it's the way that I connect with others.

[10 : 24] Gossip becomes a relational connector point for me, where I'm constantly communicating information in the hope that this person will connect with me, and love me, and approve of me in some kind of way.

If we are not sure about our own lovability, then we seek to extract it from others. I'm just using gossip as an example. I will destroy that reputation in order to build this one.

That's what gossip is. It's relationally destructive in order to build this relationship. If we choose people and relationships that make us feel good about ourselves, that is one of the results of our social alienation.

I'll only choose those relationships that will make me feel good. And in that sense, I'm simply using other people to build up my own sense of self because of my deep inadequacy.

And therefore, keep covering up. Have to keep covering up more and more. Keep covering up, keep covering up, keep covering up, lest they will see the real me.

[11 : 49] We can see how sin creates barriers in verse 11. God comes into the garden. He finds Adam and then says to him, Who told you you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?

Now, what God's trying to do here with Adam in this moment, he's trying to get Adam to confess his sin. He's trying to get Adam to repent. He's trying to help Adam see that he has failed.

And so Adam has a choice. He knows God. He's walked and talked with him in the Garden of Eden for who knows how long. He's got a choice here. He could lean into God's mercy.

He could have admitted this point. You're right. I am so flawed. I have done the wrong thing.

Instead, he makes a decision to justify himself.

In verse 12, You see what he does? Oh, come on, God.

[12:59] Seriously. You know that helper that you gave me? She did it. Not only is he blaming Eve, he's blaming God.

You know? I mean, if it wasn't for the helper, we wouldn't have this scenario. He turns the focus away from himself onto Eve and onto God.

And Eve does the same thing. Verse 13, The serpent deceived me and I ate. There is even a breakdown in relationship with the animal world.

God, it's not my fault. The dog ate the homework. Not my fault at all, God. God. Racism, sexism, classism, every other relational barrier that we keep fueling is linked to Genesis 3 and the decision to disobey God.

The fourth thing that happens when God is disobeyed is Adam and Eve are cut off from nature. There's even physical alienation.

[14:09] Verses 17 onwards. Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat from. Cursed is the ground because of you.

Through painful toil, you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you. And you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground.

Since from it you were taken. For dust you are. Into dust you will return. We saw in the second message of this series, humanity was created to steward creation as God's representative.

From the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed God, it put them and us at loggerheads with the creation that we were meant to steward.

Things do not work well. And there is this big problem. Nature draws us in. It is meant to draw us in. We are meant to delight in it, but it is not our friend.

[15:22] Disease, floods, extreme weather, earthquakes, landslides, and the weeds I was trying to dig out in my garden yesterday. And on it goes.

And goes and goes. Because sin ruined our relationship with the natural world. The great English preacher George Whitefield once asked, haven't you ever noticed that when you come near the animals, they growl at us?

They bark at us? The birds screech at us and fly away? Do you know why? They know that we have a quarrel with their master. Nature draws us in and it wears us down.

It's why we go to work and we delight in it on one level and it ruins us on another. While it's satisfying on one level, but deeply dissatisfying on another.

It's why the emails keep coming and keep coming and keep coming and keep coming and they will never stop. Now all of these alienations come because we have rejected and we are now hiding from God.

[16:40] This is how the Christian faith understands what is wrong with the world. What the problems of the world are.

It's deep and it's complex and it's quite devastating. Every single area of life is touched by sin.

Now I would suggest that every other worldview, every other worldview, whether it be religious or secular, is more simplistic in the way it tries to understand the world.

What I mean by that is other worldviews tend to identify the source of the world's problems or our personal problems in one or two of the alienations I mentioned, but not all of the alienations of the world.

The stream right-wingers say that the problem with the world is the left-wingers. They're the bad people. They're the bad people over there.

[17:43] Those other people are the problem. Others say it's psychological oppression is the problem with our world. Give everyone a healthy self-esteem and the world will be changed.

Others say it's social isolation. Learn to love and the world will be problems and be solved. You see, what happens with every other way you look at it, every other solution wants to find some villain in the world.

And if we can solve that villain, then our problems are fixed. The Bible says that villain is sin and it's touched every single thing in our existence.

Everything. Sin's the problem. It's not religion and it's not irreligion. It's not right-wing. It's not left-wing. It's not this racial group.

It's not that racial group. It's not the body nor the mind. Sin is the problem. And that's why the Christian church, as well as the life of the individual Christian, our response to a broken world ought to be one of comprehensive healing.

[19 : 12] comprehensive healing. Some churches, you might call these churches more conservative churches, would focus on the spiritual alienation and a little bit of the psychological alienation.

Others, which tend to be more liberal churches, focus on the physical and the social alienation in our world. What we desire here at St. Paul's is to have an appropriate balance of seeking to meet all kinds of alienations in this world.

The problems of this world are not just solved by people needing just to love each other a bit more and just by being accepting and embracing of everything.

Nor are they solved just by telling them you need to repent of your sin. It's proclamation of the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ and works of service of serving the alienations of our world.

It's all of those things. This is how we seek to bless the world that is broken by sin. Which brings me to the second point, the blessing. How does the blessing come then to our world?

[20 : 39] How does this broken world get healed? Verse 15 is a tremendous hope. Verse 15 is only one of two places in the Bible.

Only one of two places in the Bible where God verbalizes a curse. The others in chapter four of Genesis. The only two places in the Bible. I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. What's interesting here is the division of the world. The division between the serpent and the woman and the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring.

Now, is that saying, therefore, that all people from here on in are going to have a problem with snakes? Well, now, I've got to agree with Indiana Jones.

I don't like snakes. All right? Not a personal preference. Although, I don't like spiders more. But that's not what's being said here.

[21 : 52] Let me just take that out in case you're putting that down in your notes. John 8.44 sheds a little bit of light on what's being said here. You belong to your father. This is Jesus speaking, the devil.

And you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth. For there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

So the serpent's children, according to John 8.44, the offspring are those who buy into his lie. His lie that God is not good.

That lie. And as we saw last week, this lie permeates right through to every human heart that God cannot be trusted.

He cannot be trusted. In fact, this is not in your notes. I said, for those of you who are reading it, I said a couple of weeks ago, the language, the name of God changes in Genesis.

[23 : 04] So from in Genesis chapter one, it is Elohim, almighty God, the creator of all things, Elohim. And then when he creates humanity, it shifts to Elohim Yahweh, the creator almighty God who is in covenant relationship with people.

And I said, that is Elohim Yahweh is the dominant name for God in Genesis chapter two, the end of chapter two, right through until later in Genesis.

The dominant name. There's only one place in Genesis where once Elohim Yahweh is used, it shifts back to Elohim and Elohim Yahweh is not used.

Only one place. In other words, there's only one place in Genesis where the disconnection happens between a powerful God and a relating God.

Only one place. And it's in the serpent's dialogue with Eve. The main thing that the serpent does with Eve is he disconnects relationship with God.

[24 : 15] And that is the impact of sin in our lives. And we buy into that lie here that he is not a good God. That if you obey him, you follow him, you trust in him, you will ruin your life.

And we buy into that lie every time we gossip. And every other sin.

If you want to be fulfilled and happy, you have to determine how to live your life. And that is the lie that's deep in every human heart. Notice what God says here.

I will put enmity between your offspring and hers. First of all, God says, I will take the initiative. I will put.

It's not saying here that some are bad and some are good by nature. That's not what it's saying. It says that God will take the initiative and as a result, some will reject the lies of the serpent because of God's initiative.

[25 : 35] Those are the offspring of Eve. Notice that he doesn't say the offspring of Adam.

Have you ever read that and wondered why Eve, not Adam? I mean, this is a patriarchal society where genealogies were all about blokes.

So, why mention Eve? Why emphasize Eve? It's a good question. I'm not going to answer just yet. We'll get there in a minute. What is intriguing is the first part of verse 15 is that it's all plural.

Two groups of people, children of Satan, children of Eve. Then there's a shift to the singular in the original Hebrew language. At the end of verse 15, he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

That is, there is an individual who will crush the serpent and his lies. And as he crushes the serpent's head, the serpent will be in an attempt to destroy, to destroy him.

[26 : 56] The he. This person is the offspring of the woman. Why not the man? Why is it Eve and not Adam? There is only one person in the history of humanity that was the, who was only an offspring of a woman.

Only one person in history who was only ever offspring of just a woman. Not, I'm an offspring of a man and a woman as you all are. but not Jesus.

And we celebrate the offspring of a woman, a virgin, will conceive and give birth to a boy and his name will be called Emmanuel, God with us.

You see, Genesis 3.15 is the earliest account looking forward to the coming of Jesus Christ who will destroy the works, the lies of Satan.

When the creator God, the rule of the universe comes, he's going to come to bring blessing. He's coming to undo all aspects of the curse.

[28 : 13] All aspects of the curse. He went to the cross, was abandoned by his father, rejected by his friends in turmoil in the garden beforehand.

Every single aspect of the cross, every single aspect of the cross, of the, sorry, of the curse is dealt with at the cross.

And we sing about it Christmas every year. The Christmas carol, Joy to the World, was written by Watts, based on Psalm 98 and Genesis 3.

Joy to the World. It's the one we always end with every year, Joy to the World. Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found.

[29 : 27] Comprehensive healing. So first application, right in front of you in your seats is invites to bring people, invite them to Christmas.

It's all about the reversal of the curse that they are experiencing every single day of their life. Joy to the World declares as the Bible declares that when Jesus comes to crush the serpent he is crushing all the effects of the serpent's lies.

Satan attacked him. Satan participated and was in great joy as Christ was nailed to the cross.

Finally, I'm killing God, not realizing that at the time his head was being crushed.

he came to make his blessings flow as far as the curse has gone.

And so as a Christian church, we seek to make an impact in every aspect of the curse and as far as it's gone. As a Christian church, we welcome everyone here.

[30 : 41] Everyone, however sin has touched your life, including if you're a habitual gossip, however sin has touched your life, we welcome you.

Whatever impact, it doesn't matter who you are, there's not a single person who's excluded from this church. church, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter whether you're white-collar, you're blue-collar, it doesn't matter whether you're neurotypical or neurodiverse like me, it doesn't matter who you are, you are welcome in this church.

But we want to bring healing to your life, healing to your life. we welcome you, but we do not affirm your sin.

We do not affirm it, but we welcome you. We want you to embrace, embrace the healing of Jesus Christ in your life.

Because that's what the offspring of Eve do in the world. We spread joy as we seek to work to undo the curse and to spread the blessing.

[32 : 04] Not that we all do everything, not that we all do everything, each is gifted in our own way and have our own particular unique opportunities, but this is the work of the King that we at St.

Paul's are committed to. We treasure Jesus together for the joy of all people.