

SIN

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[0 : 00] I got a free kick tonight. That means that I could preach what I like. So I thought I'd talk to you about something which has been on my mind since Deb first preached three weeks ago when she preached from Genesis 3 in the series that we've just had in Identity.

Because she sowed a few seeds with me which I thought about in another way beyond there. And anyway, let me go into it. One of the things that she showed us in terms of the Garden of Eden between Genesis 2 and Genesis 3 is what is lost.

So in the Garden of Eden, Adam has a place of significance. He's safe. He meets God face to face. He's in a very secure place.

And with the fall, all that is lost. Now one of the things for me, which is a major personal struggle which I grapple with often, and I have to remind myself the Gospel in terms of being able to deal with it, I think it's a struggle which is not just mine, but I think it's probably the struggle for a number of you as well.

You come to the New Testament. You come to the Bible. You read things about who we are in Christ. And in some places, the Bible speaks in very exalted terms about who we are.

[1 : 17] So say in Ephesians 2, verse 6, it says, And I think what it's doing is it's speaking about a future reality, but it's bringing it into the present and saying, that is our status right now.

That is who we are in Christ. But my experience, which is a present reality for me, is that even as a Christian believer, I have an ongoing struggle with sin.

And so when I read my New Testament, I read Romans chapter 7, and Paul says, it is mine. And he says, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

And then he goes on and says, but thanks be to God. And I think what, so you've got this struggle between what it feels like still to struggle with sin, and also the Scriptures saying to us how great we are and how safe we are in Christ.

And people do various things with that struggle to try to make sense of it. So one of the things that people do is they say, look, I'm complete, I've made perfect in Christ, I've already arrived, almost as though we've got this state of sinless perfection now, I can no longer offend God ever again.

[2 : 47] So if I go back to the Bible study group that I was first a member of when I became a Christian, we had a woman there who was associated with a Christian cult, and she used to claim that she didn't get sick anymore because she's been made perfect in Christ.

And one night she's missing from our small group, and one of the members goes to see her, knocks on the door, no answer, knocks on the door, no answers, hammer on the door, and finally she answers it, and she's very embarrassed because she's very sick.

And she didn't want anybody to see how sick she was, because being sick was contrary to what she had come to believe. I've heard a story, I don't really know if it's true or not, I think it might be true, but in the 1800s there was a really famous preacher in London called Charles Spurgeon, and he had a member of his congregation come to him one day, and he said, I just want to talk to you pastor, I want to tell you that I've really been growing in Christ, and I have achieved this, I just feel like I'm free of sin.

God's been doing this work of grace in my life, and I no longer have the struggles, the sin, that used to be part of what was going on for me. And Spurgeon said, we've got to come and have dinner with us, and tell us some more about it.

So he goes for dinner at the pastor's house, and in the middle of dinner he tells a bit more about what's been going on for him, and Spurgeon picks up this jug of ice cold water, and pours it on his dinner guest.

[4 : 24] And the guy goes off his nut, and Spurgeon says, there you see, the old man isn't dead yet, he just needed a glass of water to revive him.

See, to move to that extreme and think that we've moved beyond sin is absurd. That's one way that we deal with life this side of heaven, and it's to claim future realities and bring them into the present in a way which is just absurd.

But the other way is to go, woe is me, and live a life as a believer of absolute despair. Almost as though there's nothing good in me, there's nothing worthy in me, rather than seeing the promises of the gospel, which say we are made new in Christ, and we are now regarded differently by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Genesis 3, which is where I do want you to look at as I'm talking, is something which could only be described as a sheer tragedy for humanity. Genesis 2, Adam's in God's presence, he's doing what God gave him to do, he's safe in the garden, he's not on his own, he's got work to do, he's quite secure.

And God gives him just one command, just one restriction on his life and on his behaviour.

[5 : 59] He says to Adam, and he gives him this command even before Eve is created. So Eve does not hear God give Adam this command.

And he says to Adam, God says to Adam, you can eat from any tree in the garden, except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will certainly die.

And we know the story, the serpent's crafty, he approaches the woman, and there's this really strange interaction which goes on, which is like this clever mix of truth and deception.

Did God, remember he's speaking to the woman who never heard the command from God herself, did God really say, you can't eat from any tree? Oh no, no, that's not what God said.

We can eat fruit of the trees, yes, but we can't eat or touch the tree in the middle of the garden, because if we, if we touch that tree, if we eat from that tree, we'll die.

[7 : 16] Which is not what God said, because he said eat from, but he didn't talk about touching it. And then, the serpent tells what is a bald-faced lie. You won't die.

You'll be like God. You eat a bit of this, and you'll be like God. God's the one who's really trying to stop you enjoying all the things that he knows that you can't participate in.

And she looks, and she desires the wisdom that the tree might give her, and she eats, and she gives to Adam, and both become very vulnerable before God.

They become aware of their own nakedness. And there's a whole lot of questions go with that. You can ask bucket loads of questions about that passage.

Why did the serpent approach Eve? Now, she'd only heard the command secondhand. She'd heard it from Adam. She hadn't heard it from God. In my community group the other week, I did something really risky.

[8 : 24] And in my community group here tonight, and I can say this, I thought I'd play, I'd take a risk. Oh, sorry, James and Katrina. Uh-oh. I could say, you know, did the serpent work on the weakest link?

Did he go to the woman rather than to the man? And I've put considerable distance between you when I say that tonight. Let's not go there, eh? But then you ask the question, where's Adam in all this?

Verse 6 says that she gave some to her husband who was with her. He was there. And it seems like Adam has heard the whole thing.

And yet, he's totally passive in this story. He doesn't step up and correct the serpent and say, no, God didn't say that. He said, don't eat from the tree. He didn't say, don't touch it.

And he doesn't tell his wife, you're a fool woman if you eat from that. You'll die. God said we would die. He just stands there weak and inactive while his beautiful naked wife says, have a bite, dear.

[9 : 41] Men. Men. Now, Larry Carab wrote a book called The Silence of Adam.

And I think it's what you see here, the silence of Adam in terms of this interaction. He's passive. He's quiet. There's no leadership. And it's a sin that is reflected in families when dads don't step up and take spiritual leadership.

Now, I've been talking about this in my Ephesians group this afternoon. We're not talking to blokes and saying, you've got to step up and take control of your family. But you do need to step up in a Christ-like way and love your wife as the scriptures call you to and to lay down your life on behalf of others rather than it all being about you.

So taking initiative to serve, taking initiative to read the Bible, taking initiative to pray, taking initiative to go the extra mile. Marriage is not about you, Dad.

It is about how you serve your family under Christ. And God comes visiting. He's been visiting up till now.

[10 : 56] This is not new. He's been walking with them in the garden. And there's three questions. Where are you? No. We're hiding.

We're naked. Who told you you were naked? And then the crucial question, have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?

Adam, the man, stands there and said, she gave it to me. In fact, he says more than that.

He says, the woman you gave me made me eat from it. What's he do? Blames God, blames her. And she blames the snake.

It's your fault. You gave it to me. See, it's something. I've been thinking about this for a couple of weeks and I see it in myself and I see it in what others do to me sometimes.

[12 : 13] But we use the language of blame when the spotlight starts to fall on us about our sin and our weakness. If you're in a marriage, your husband or wife will sometimes point out things about you that you perhaps don't really want to hear.

Or you might think of yourself as humble and think I'm really open, I really want to hear those things, but the truth is we often only want to hear them when we're ready to hear them, not when they're ready to tell us to us about it.

And when I do that, I think it's pride which is driving me because I want to be exposed on my terms and not on their terms.

But this is on God's terms. He asks the question and he's not ready to fess up. And Adam just blames. And if you read the rest of the story, God does judge, but it's with mercy.

They do die spiritually. They're cut off from direct contact with God, cast out of the garden. It's an incredibly lonely place to be. It's a huge loss. They don't die physically then and there, but they're destined to die physically as well.

[13 : 30] Life now becomes difficult for men in work. Life becomes difficult for women in childbirth. Relationships between men and women become difficult in terms of marriage.

So your desire will be for your husband, but your husband will rule over you. They're shut out from the garden. They're cut off from God. The consequences of this are absolutely tragic.

And yet despite the tragedy and the fall, God's mercy is on view because he takes away their fig leaves and he gives them clothes which are made of animal skin.

An animal needs to die to hide their nakedness. And they're also shown mercy because they're shut out from the garden before they can also reach out to the tree that they had permission to eat from, which was the tree of life, and eat from it.

And that's merciful because it means that God prevented them from making sin eternal. And so cut off from God, life in the world becomes lonely, it becomes uncertain.

[14 : 43] There's this tragic disconnect from God. Damage is done. And this is damage that Adam himself is unable to change. Ephesians chapter 2 describes our state without God.

It says we're powerless. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. We cannot atone for our own sin. It uses the language of death. A dead person cannot bring themselves to life.

We need action from totally outside of us. Romans chapter 5 says that this is such a significant failure it can only be reversed by a second Adam, a new Adam.

And so in Romans chapter 5 verse 6 it says at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

And then in Romans chapter 5 verse 14 And then in verse 15 For if by the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

[16 : 10] And I think if you look and if you think about this you see that untold and irreversible damage is done at the fall which people like Adam were unable to deal with themselves.

And there's some things that we can do that are just not reversible. In terms of sin I don't think there is anything that we can do which is beyond hope and the grace of the gospel.

But there are some things that we can do that become irreversible in terms of say relationships. I was going to break a glass out here tonight and I thought better of it. But smash a glass it's broken and you're not going to want that glass again even if I glue it together with arrow dot all over it or something like that.

You're just not going to want it. It's gone. It's done. It's finished. And we can do some things in relationship that cause great harm. So you know husbands and wives they can be unfaithful and it can absolutely smash a relationship.

Or within all sorts of relationships we can speak a word which is wrong or out of place or harsh or unloving or untruthful or whatever it is that word's not easily taken back again.

[17 : 24] It goes out there and does its damage. damage and sometimes that damage is great harm. But it doesn't mean that we're without hope.

I listened to this the other week and I thought about it. What if what if Adam had gone another way? And this is what I think you must have heard it kick. What if when God came to him in the garden he'd actually not blamed but left himself in the spotlight and in that moment when God said have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from what if Adam had said yes Lord I did and yes Lord I neglected my family I did not correct my wife and yes Lord all these things have happened.

Being the man and he'd said I'm a fool I have sinned against heaven and against earth and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Now in some ways we don't really know what God would have done because Adam because Adam didn't do it.

But can you see that in the gospel we have a different way to answer that question that God asked Adam. We have a different way of dealing with that moment from the way that Adam dealt with that moment.

We have been given the tools in the gospel which allows us to stand there and face Adam's sin in us not to live a perfect life because we can't live a perfect life we can't do that we can't self-atone but we can face sin and we can face failure knowing that we have one who has atoned for our sins and allowed us therefore to stand there and say yes Lord I have done wrong.

[19 : 36] We come to God not in independence but in dependence and in faith and we trust him in that moment. And so this side of heaven we're called perfect and yet what are we doing we're still struggling with sin and weakness and offence in between us and God and in all the relationships we have with other people but we have this ability to function because we have one who has reversed Adam's sin and gives us a different way of answering the question where are you we do not have to hide.

Now I reckon you see this worked out all through the New Testament but a couple of places in particular Luke's gospel a rich young bloke comes up to Jesus in Luke 18 in Luke 18 and he says to Jesus good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?

and Jesus says well why do you call me good? No one's good only God alone is good and he says well you know the commandments don't commit adultery don't murder don't steal don't tell lies only your father and mother and he says to Jesus I've done all those since I was a little boy and Jesus said to him you only lack one thing sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me and when he heard these things he became very sad because he was extremely rich but it's a bit subtle because he sort of comes to

Jesus and says what must I do what's the big thing that I might do to get eternal life it's sort of actually a me focused question if it was Adam it's almost like how can I work my way out of this mess what's the one thing I can do that would trump all the bad stuff that's happened which would guarantee I'm back with you I've got eternal life and I think Jesus with this particular man I'm not saying to everyone but to this particular man he's showing him by what he asks him to do that there's something that he's really unwilling to do for God and he goes away very sad and Jesus is sad but he's tried to come to God on his own terms but then there's the other story which is just before it in Luke's gospel Jesus tells this parable to some who trusted in their own righteousness and who looked down on other people two men he said went up to the temple to pray one of them's a

Pharisee a really good religious person and the other is a tax collector he's scum and filth and traitor and all the rest of it and the Pharisee stands by himself and he prays God I really thank you that I'm not like other people I really thank you I'm not an extortioner I'm not unjust I'm not an adulterer I've never done any of that dirty stuff or even like especially I really thank you that I'm not like him see his response to Adam's nature is to say God and it's with thanksgiving to God God I thank you that I'm such a good boy I thank you that I've really done so much that's just right in your eyes and the other man won't even raise his eyes he knows he's a bad boy for want of a better word he beats his chest and he says

[23 : 58] God have mercy on me the sinner God have mercy on me the sinner he knows his life is absolutely barren he knows he's got nothing to commend himself he knows that life and relationship with God is absolutely shattered he knows that he's despised in the eyes of other people and they can see his sin for all that it is and yet he comes to God he comes to Jesus and he throws himself on his mercy God have mercy on me the sinner doesn't pretend to be anything other than what he is and he does what Adam never did he owns his sin he throws himself on the mercy of God and Jesus says

I tell you that this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted and so brothers and sisters I think where I want to leave you tonight and what I want to say to you I want to go back to the what if question in that moment when we're shamed and we're exposed and we're seen for all that we were in terms of rebellion against God which Adam certainly was not to take a defiant stand and still blame everybody else for what I'm like and what's happened to me but in that moment to throw ourselves on the mercy of the Lord Jesus and say Father yes Father I have sinned against heaven and I've sinned against earth and I deserve nothing of your mercy but I throw myself on your mercy and ask for your grace and your forgiveness in my life and we are empowered to do that because

God has acted apart from us in Christ and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin he has put things right that were broken in the garden and because he has put things right that were broken in the garden we are safe and do not need to fear confessing what we are really like and what we really need from God our heavenly father amen