

Our Return to Dust

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to Genesis 3, where we read the book of Genesis chapter 3, looking at verse 9. I'm going to look at some of the major parts of the chapter, but we'll focus for the moment on verse 9 and also on verse 19.

But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? And verse 19, which says, By the sweat of your face you will eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you are taken, and for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Well, this is a very crucial chapter, as I know you appreciate. It's a very crucial chapter in the teaching of the whole Bible and in the run of teaching from the beginning through to the end of the Bible.

It's important to see chapters 1 and 2 and to know something of what's in them, as we've tried to do in studies recently, just looking at its account of the creation. And now that led to the creation of man, especially mankind, and the relationship that God set up there.

And some of the principles that we saw arising from that, the principle of the Sabbath, the principle of rest, the principle of work, and the principle of marriage.

[1 : 21] And how all of these are built into the creation setting itself, and so remain as permanent principles for human life. But then it's so important that we come immediately into chapter 3 in the way the Bible teaches us about our human condition, because chapter 1 and 2 is in the past.

We didn't stay in chapter 1 and 2 in what they contain with regard to life in the bliss of Eden. And chapter 3 is important in respect to its content, and to regard it as an account of actual events is actually very crucial for us as well.

It's not just that we regard its teaching as important, but we regard it as teaching that sets out what actually happened and the way it happened. This is not something that human beings have written as fiction or as poetry.

It's not an account by human beings trying to somehow or other find an explanation for the way things are in human life or in our environment or in human relationships.

This is actually God saying to us, because it's part of God's inspired word, it is God saying to us, This is the reason why things are as they are. This is how things have come to be as you see them in the world of human beings we belong to.

[2 : 44] This is where all that is wrong originates, in the fall of man, and this is how the fall of man came about. So that's really why it's such a crucial chapter, and how it's crucial for us to see it as an account of an actual event in the history of the world and of mankind.

Looking at it under two headings briefly today, first of all we'll look at the attack that took place here upon these human beings, upon this couple Adam and Eve, and secondly, the aftermath of that attack and what it left behind.

The attack is described, first of all, as the serpent's approach to the woman, and what he said to the woman, and how the woman responded to that as part of the aftermath of the attack.

Now we're not going to go into the theology of it in the sense in which we know that God made a covenant with Adam for himself and for his posterity, as the catechism reminds us the way it puts it. In other words, Adam was there as a representative of the whole human race. And so what happened in Adam's case affected the whole human race coming afterwards.

[4 : 00] The sin into which Adam plunged is a sin into which he plunged all of us. And that is how the Bible then goes on to explain the outcome of that sin and of that curse and of that resulting fall into sin and sinfulness.

But then, of course, you have the wonderful account of God's redemption from that. How the last Adam, how Jesus Christ, came to deal with that problem, with that reality of man in his sinfulness,

and came to deliver us from that.

So let's look at the attack, first of all, and how it's described. Now notice, first of all, it begins saying the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

And it's important we notice there was an actual serpent, an animal, the serpent involved in this event. And it says the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field.

In other words, we take it from that, that the serpent itself by its very nature was a crafty, subtle kind of beast. But as you find the chapter developing, it becomes very obvious that the serpent is not just a mere serpent.

[5 : 21] There's another agency using the serpent. There's a power or agency using the serpent. The evil that already exists in the devil, in God's creation in that sense, has not yet made its way into human experience.

But that's just what's about to happen. But that evil, that personage, that spirit, that is the devil and Satan, is the user of the serpent, is hidden within the serpent, if you like, in the approach of the serpent to the woman.

And that's why the Bible elsewhere frequently or many times describes Satan as that great serpent. Because he has the subtlety that the serpent as a beast naturally had of itself.

And as the serpent comes to approach the woman, it is really effectively Satan that is coming to tempt the woman towards disobedience against God and also drawing Adam into it.

Now, therefore, you can see his subtlety in that because the serpent is a very subtle creature and has very significant powers, even naturally. Now, you remember Paul when he wrote to the Galatian church.

[6 : 38] In Galatians chapter 3, he begins that chapter by posing a question. Oh, foolish Galatians! The Galatians had departed from this whole idea of us being justified by faith in Christ.

And they were listening to people who said, no, you need more than that. You need circumcision. You need works of some kind to add to that before God will accept you. And Paul was horrified. Paul was annoyed.

And you can tell his annoyance from the way that he wrote that letter. And this is where he said, oh, foolish Galatians, who has deceived you or who has bewitched you as it is in the AV?

Now, that's a word that's really used of the serpent. You may not have seen it, but it is. You can actually see videos of this.

A serpent has a particular kind of stare. It has a certain magnetism to its eyes that can actually persuade a frog to jump into its mouth.

[7 : 42] I know that sounds horrible, but that's how it is. When a serpent fixes its stare on that poor little frog and waits for a certain time and opens its mouth, the frog jumps in.

And that's the word, the kind of word that Paul was saying, oh, foolish Galatians, who has deceived you? Who has persuaded you? Who has bewitched you?

Who has bedazzled you? So that you've taken this jump away from justification by faith alone in Christ. Well, you see, here is the serpent used by Satan.

Here is the satanic strategy. And it's a very subtle one. And he comes in disguise. You don't read anything about Satan there. The woman wasn't aware that this was actually Satan that was standing before her and speaking to her through the serpent.

Now, that's how the devil frequently is. If you go to Matthew 4 and the temptation by the devil of Jesus in the wilderness, you'll find so much there that teaches us about the wiles, the subtleties, the craftiness of the devil in his approach.

[8 : 52] He doesn't come to Jesus, first of all, out and out in all his own dark hideousness and say, here I am, I'm Satan. He comes in a way that approaches the matter in disguise.

If you are the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread. And it's only in the third temptation that he jumps out when the first two have failed. And then he tries in all his own openness and say, all of these I will give you if you fall down and worship me.

But he doesn't come like that, first and foremost. You remember Matthew 16. That Peter came to Jesus after he had described to Peter and the disciples how he'd have to go to Jerusalem.

And there he would be badly treated and they would put him to death. Lord, this shall not happen to you. Be it far from you, Lord. Put this out of your mind is what he's saying to Jesus.

What did Jesus say to him? Get behind me, Satan. What was Satan doing? He was approaching the Lord in the person of Peter.

[10:01] Burying himself. Hiding himself. Disguising himself in that disciple. Let's be aware of that as disciples of Jesus. We are not immune to being used by the devil.

And the devil can cause much damage through his disguised use of the people of God. That's part of his subtlety.

And the features of his attack are interesting. Firstly, he uses language. He speaks to the woman. Language that God had given to these human beings for their own relationship, for their relationship with God himself, and even their relationship with their environment.

They were to use language, human language, for their own good, for the glory of God, and for the proper care of their environment. Here is the devil, first and foremost, using language to twist things against God.

And he says, first of all, has God actually said? Did God really say?

[11:11] Now there are, if you like, two aspects to his attack. The features of his attack. First of all, we can say he put God's prohibition above God's provision.

The prohibition of God, what he said was forbidden, was one tree out of all the trees of the garden. And it's on that one tree that the devil focused when he came to the woman in the form of the serpent.

And he said, has God indeed said, you shall not eat of any trees in the garden? You see what he's doing? He's getting her to focus upon the one tree that's prohibited to the neglect of all the trees that are allowed.

That's his strategy. That's his strategy right through to the present day. He wants you and he wants me to focus on the one thing that is not allowed.

On the one thing that's prohibited. On the things that are prohibited. And that way he closes your mind and closes your eyes to the many, many things that God allows that God positively commends.

[12:16] You see, that's behind the idea that we shouldn't really have one day of the week specially devoted to God. The focus is on that particular day so that it's highlighted in such a way that appears to make God rather unfair.

That appears to actually say, well, God is surely being unreasonable in not giving you this day as well. Just as he said, as the serpent and the devil said to the woman in the garden, isn't God being unreasonable?

Why didn't he just give you this tree as well? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why didn't he include that one? Why did he leave one out? Why didn't he leave one out?

Why didn't he leave one out?

My father took it down and he said, no, don't touch this filament. Don't touch this lamp. Make sure you don't touch it. So he took it over to the barn.

[14:09] And I remember one day shortly after that walking into the barn on my own. Just looking around and my eye caught the tilly lamp. And I remembered his words. You mustn't touch this filament.

And of course I looked around and I said, there's nobody here to see me. I wonder what it feels like. So I reached out my little finger and just gently touched the filament and then poof, my finger went right through it.

And of course the whole world changed. And I knew I was in trouble. And that my father would see the hole in the filament and wouldn't work next time. But you see, that's the devil's strategy.

The very thing that's forbidden is the thing he wants you to focus on. And he especially wants you to focus on something restrictive in a way that's unfair of God. And then your mind and your heart go towards it.

And the sin within us begins to draw us into more sin. He turned or focused on the prohibition above the prohibition.

[15:15] But secondly, he turned God's command to a question. God's command was, you may eat all the trees of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you may not eat.

For in the day you eat of it, you will surely die. Command, imperative. That's how God put it. These were the words that he used. These were the form of words that he used. And here is the devil.

And he takes the form of the words and changes them around. And he changes it now into a question. And what's the effect of that? When you change commands into a question, first of all, it casts doubt on God's sincerity, on God's motives.

When you take it as other than a command, then obviously it doesn't become so important to you. It reduces its importance. You don't see it the same way as God actually wants you to see it. He's casting doubts on the sincerity of God, on the motive that God has in just having this one tree prohibited to these human beings.

[16:16] And you find the same thing in the temptation of Jesus and in our temptation as well when we find ourselves tempted towards what God is saying, you shall not do it.

Or even tempted to not do what God says you shall do this. Because that's the subtle strategy that Jesus saw through, of course, in the temptation in the wilderness.

Where he was saying to Jesus, if you are the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread. He's not asking Jesus to begin doubting that he is the Son of God.

He doesn't come to Jesus thinking he can get or persuade him to believe that God doesn't exist. He knows that's not possible. But what he does comes with the idea that for Jesus in those circumstances, as the Son of God, is surely not right.

Why should the Son of God be hungry? Why should such a person as the Son of God be in such a situation of restriction and deprivation and pain and hunger and all that's associated with it?

[17:30] That's why he said, if you're the Son of God, don't leave yourself like this. It's not right for you. It's not becoming for you to be in this situation. Command these stones that they be made bread. To which Jesus, of course, replied, using the word of God, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

But you know that's very often the case with ourselves. Why should you have to suffer this? Other Christians aren't suffering this. Why should you have to go through this?

Why should you have this experience when you see other people who are also believers free from such things as you're experiencing? He wants you to focus on things in such a way that will give you some doubt in your mind about God's sincerity and about God's good motive in dealing with you the way he's dealing with you.

That's one of the effects of putting the command into a question. The other effect of it is that not only does it cast doubt on God's sincerity and on God's motives, but it also denies the truth of God's threat.

Has God, or did God indeed say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? He's turning it from a command into a question, and therefore it comes pretty much to be a denial of the truth of God's threat.

[18:57] Because God's threat was in the day you eat of it, if you disobey this command, you will surely die. And the devil's strategy in turning it into a question rather than a command is just to really get into the mind of Eve and then of Adam in such a way that the threat of God really loses a lot of its force.

And that, of course, is still part of a strategy today. Because we live in a world where such things as the Bible teaches, as fundamental to its teaching, sin itself, hell, death as the wages of sin.

How many people believe that? How many people in the world will say to you, that's just fanciful nowadays? Nobody believes in that, except Christians who take the Bible far too literally.

Well, here is God saying to us, this is how we came to be where we are. This is how we came to reach such conclusions as dismisses God from our mind, as dismisses the likes of hell from our mind.

God is saying to us, if you don't believe in Jesus, you will perish. If God's saying that in terms of an address to us, then that's the truth of it. And when the devil turns it into a question, has God indeed said that?

[20:24] Is that really relevant for today's human beings? What is happening is exactly the same as happened in the Garden of Eden, where God's command is turned into a question.

And where the force of the command and the threat attached to it loses its power. That's the attack. It puts prohibition above provision.

It gets a focus away from the plenty that God had given them to the one thing that God, to test them, had denied them. And it turns his command into a question.

Oh, what about the aftermath then? We haven't got much time left, but we'll try and summarize it. First of all, we'll see it in terms of relationships in three ways. The aftermath of it is, first of all, their relationship with the ground.

Because man was taken and placed in the Garden of Eden to look after the ground, to look after the garden, to actually deal with it in a way that helped keep it as it should be kept, for his benefit and for the glory of God.

[21 : 28] And what happens now? Well, you can see there in verses 17 to 19 of this chapter itself. And because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you. In the sweat of your face, by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground. For out of it you are taken, for you are dust. And to dust you shall return. Instead of the ground submitting to man's dominion in the proper sense over it, as he had been created to do, the ground eventually comes to swallow him up.

Death, the grave, instead of the ground being under man's own control. That's the wages of sin. That's the immediate result of his disobedience against God. And that's why he lost the right to the tree of life.

[22 : 45] Why he was expelled, as this chapter tells us, from the garden at the end of the chapter. He drove out. God drove out the man. It wasn't just a polite saying, will you please now leave this garden?

He drove him out. There was a forceful expulsion. An expulsion because he had lost the right to live there. He had lost the right to the tree of life.

And because of that, he had to be expelled from that environment that God had prepared for him to begin with. It altered his whole relationship to that environment, to the ground, to his surroundings. And you see the damage of that today when exploitation is so largely a feature of the way human beings regard the environment rather than care and attentiveness to it.

Secondly, it drastically affected their relationship with each other. You can see here in verse 7, the eyes of them both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

[24 : 00] And you go to verse, you actually then follow that through in the chapter and you can see the way that the harmony and the balance between them is completely shattered.

They're embarrassed in each other's presence whereas previously, nakedly in each other's presence, there was no sense of embarrassment.

There was no sense of shame. There was no sense of having to cover themselves up. And now with that sense of shame, they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

But there's more than that to it. When it comes to God demanding an answer from them of what happened and why it happened and why they had done this, you see what happened is that they began to blame each other because Adam said, the woman whom you gave to me, she made me do this.

She gave to me and I ate. He's actually blaming God as much as blaming his wife. the woman whom you gave to me.

[25 : 09] As if it's God's fault. And that's one of the consequences of sin that we constantly have distrust of God as much as distrust of one another.

It has affected human relationships. The element of distrust enters into it and at the very heart of sin is distrust. And when you find the chapter here talking about nakedness and now being embarrassed and anxious in that nakedness, you can see that that is really also at the very heart of our fallenness and our sinfulness, this anxiety.

Because our nakedness in the Bible, in its teaching, means far more than something physical. It means our weakness and our need and our shame and the anxiety that has come into our lot now from being sinners and from being in rebellion against God and having spoiled the harmony between ourselves as human beings.

And that's why it's, as we'll see in a minute, a wonderful emphasis in the chapter itself that God is going to deal with this in redemption, in salvation, in the seed of the woman who is, of course, Jesus Christ, as the New Testament makes clear.

But that essentially is where their sin is so obvious. And where God comes to clothe them to cover their nakedness.

[26 : 39] That's such a graphic contrast in the chapter, isn't it, to the way they try to clothe themselves. They sewed themselves fig leaves together and they made themselves loincloths.

And when it comes to Adam and Eve being clothed by God, he made garments of skins and clothed them. He covered them in their entirety. And, of course, you take that as an indication of the inadequacy of trying to clothe ourselves and cover our sins in our own doings in contrast to the way God said about doing it in Jesus Christ.

But that's still the big point at issue, isn't it, in human life? The big point being the contrast between what we ourselves see as appropriate and what God says is or isn't appropriate.

And especially dealing with the anxiety of being sinners. Even if we don't recognize, as we often have to say about human society, it's not that people recognize that they're actually sinners or that sin is a reality, but they cannot actually rid themselves of the anxieties, the perplexities, the complications that our fall and our sin has brought about.

And one of the commentators on the book of Genesis, Walter Brueggemann, has the following statement, which I thought was very perceptive and very important to take note of. He says, the attempts to resolve anxiety in our culture are largely psychological, economic, cosmetic.

[28 : 19] They are bound to fail because they do not approach anxiety's causes. Our public life is largely premised on an exploitation of our common anxiety.

See what he's saying? Not only do we, by and large, find people in this society we belong to, in a culture we belong to, not only do we find them not really dealing with the source of the anxiety and sinfulness, but actually the anxiety is exploited in other ways.

And he goes on to say, the advertising of our consumerism and the drive of our acquisitive society, like the serpent, seduce us into believing that there are securities apart from the reality of God.

Seduce us into believing that there are securities apart from the reality of God. The relationship with God has been shattered, as well as that between themselves.

That's the third relationship with the ground, or with the environment, with one another, and with God. And in many ways that's the most important relationship that's been shattered by it.

[29 : 43] Instead of the intimacy, the communion that they had with God, when God now comes walking into the garden in the cool of the day, their first response is not to run towards them and say how delightful it is that he's come to see them again.

They run and hide from him. They try and hide themselves in the bushes. It's so different. Usually, the hearing of the voice was something to which they gave regard and obedience and delight.

Now they want to hide from it. They want to get away as far as possible from it, though they cannot ultimately do that. Which is why the question in verse 9 is so important, where he says, where are you, Adam?

He called to the man, called to Adam and said, where are you? Adam. And that's a question that the gospel addresses to us all because the word Adam, Adam in Hebrew, very close to the word for ground, which is Adamah.

Adamah. Adam. You see how close they are and there's a reason for that because not only is Adam reminded of how he was dust and made from the dust and returns to the dust, but it reminds us too that this question is not just through Adam as an individual, it's to mankind.

[30 : 58] It's to all of us. Where are you? Where has sin left you? What has sin done to you? What are your needs as a sinner? How are you addressing your need as a sinner?

What condition are you in as a sinner? What is it you need more than anything else as a sinner and as a fallen sinner? That and a multiplication of other questions actually comes into your mind when this question is put, where are you?

It's God's address down through the generations, right through to the present day and will be to the end of the world, to human beings. Where are you? Where are you?

And he brings them out of their hiding and then he addresses them. And in addressing them, God does something very wonderful. He tells them about how he is going to place enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

The seed of the serpent being the human race in rebellion against God and those who continue in enmity against God. And the seed of the woman, as again Galatians makes clear, to be Jesus Christ particularly.

[32 : 18] He will crush your head, he said to the serpent, you will bruise his heel. You will wound him, but he will crush you.

And that's what happened at Calvary and the death of Jesus. The last Adam. Because our return to the original Eden is closed off.

The cherubim and the flaming sword were placed there to seal the way so that we could not re-enter it. But God has a better garden even than that one.

The garden of heaven. And human beings can only enter heaven without sin and without death. And that's why Jesus came. Because Jesus took our nature, our human nature, our very human nature, and Jesus died in that human nature.

Jesus took the sin, our sin, and he took our curse, and he took the toil, and the conflict, and the pain. And yes, he actually himself in his own person through his body returned to the dust, although he saw no corruption, but his body was laid in the tomb.

[33 : 31] There's the Son of God in this human nature coming to occupy the grave. Have you ever noticed in Psalm 22 and verse 15 at the end of the verse where the psalmist, as he represents Christ and as it's a prophecy of Christ, is saying, you lay me in the dust of death.

Have you ever noticed that word dust? You lay me in the dust of death. That's an anticipation of how Jesus was bodily buried in the sepulcher.

He really died every aspect of death, including our separation from God, just as Adam was driven out of Eden.

So Jesus said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you driven me out? I think it was Professor Finlayson, late Professor Finlayson, who once said, the question here of verse 9 in chapter 3 of Genesis, question in which God addresses our humanity, where are you, was never fully answered until that question came from the cross.

Jesus, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Where are we? In ourselves we are lost, outside of God's garden, but in Christ we are restored.

[35 : 24] The way to the tree of life is reopened, because Christ himself has borne the curse. And it's interesting, isn't it? The Bible is largely about three gardens.

The garden of Eden, now closed. The garden of heaven, with access open. And the garden that links them all, that garden in which there was a new tomb, which none had ever occupied, there they laid Jesus.

Jesus, as the gospel of John puts it, he's the link between death and life. And that's the question for you and for me today.

Where am I? Am I with Adam or am I with the last Adam? Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your provision of life.

In the place of the death we brought upon ourselves. Bless us now, we pray, as we read in your word and consider the origin of our fallenness and how it is within ourselves.

[36 : 44] Forgive our sin, we pray. Accept us and receive us into fellowship with you. Grant that we may remain in that communion with you in which we will delight and you will be glorified and all for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Let's conclude this morning singing our final psalm, which is Psalm 30 on page 34.

Psalm number 30, page 34, the tune St. Minver. We'll sing verses 1 to 5. O Lord, I will exalt your name for you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat triumphantly.

And so on through to verse 5 to God's praise. O Lord, I will exalt your name for you have rescued me.

■■■■ My health O Lord You brought me From the grave And saved my soul From death You holy ones Sing to the Lord Sing out with joyful voice

[38 : 58] When you recall His holy name Then grace him and rejoice His anger But a moment last My promise May he ever Saves Though tears May last Throughout the night Joy Comes With Morning's Raise I'll go to this front door here After the benediction Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit

Be with you now and always Amen For theako lions