

The Garden Ruined

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[0 : 00] Well, we're turning back to the chapter that we read in Genesis chapter 3. I'm not going to spend much time by way of introduction because we covered all of it last night.

Remember that I said to you there were four things I wanted to think about. One was the uniqueness of the nature of humankind, and then the work that God had given him to do, and then the companion that God had created specifically for him.

But you remember the last one was the choice that man faced, the first man faced. And that's what I want to explore with us this evening, the choice that the man faced.

I want to do that by just thinking about three things. One of them, the first one, is the specific arrangement that God came to with Adam. The specific arrangement that related to, focused on, the trees he was allowed to eat and the tree that he wasn't allowed to eat.

And then secondly, I want us to think about the process. That's what this chapter is all about, at least in the first part of it. The process through which sin entered into the world.

[1 : 12] I want us to think about the conversation that took place between Eve and the serpent. And then I want us to think lastly of the fall itself. That moment when Eve and Adam, they took the forbidden fruit, and they immediately, everything changed.

Everything changed. The whole atmosphere changed suddenly from one of perfection to one of destruction and shame and darkness.

And I want us to look at the consequences of God's wrath and his mercy. So I think there's enough there to be getting on with for the next half an hour or so.

First of all, I want us to think about the arrangement, the specific arrangement that God came to with Adam. Now, we're not told the half, of course, of what Adam was shown, the kind of conversations that must have taken place between Adam and God.

There must have been loads and loads of words exchanged between the two of them. But the Bible wants us to focus on a very narrow area of interest. And the reason for that is because this is where the test of man lay.

[2 : 28] This is where it was going to be determined whether or not the man who was made in the image of God was going to live up to that image perfectly and indestructibly.

And so the focus of the chapter is on what they ate, the trees in the garden, and what God was prepared to permit them to eat, but also what he forbade, the prohibition that God imposed on the man.

And we're given this in very, very clear terms, and specific reference is made to it. God says, first of all, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Now, if you think about it, just think about that one verse. It's formulated in a particular way. And theologians down the centuries have identified such a formulation as a covenant.

A covenant. And so when it came to the writing of the subordinate standard that our church adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith, they identify that specific covenant as, you should know this, the covenant of works.

[4 : 02] The covenant of works. And just as an aside, it's probably best, it's probably valuable to just spend one or two minutes just identifying what a covenant was in the first place.

A covenant was a promised bond. A promised bond. I suppose that's probably the best way of describing it. And it very often takes place in human terms between two kings, two countries that are at war with one another.

When one country, when it becomes clear that one country is going to dominate and win the war, to the extent where the other king decides, I'm going to surrender, they come together and they talk terms of peace.

And in the old days, way back in Old Testament times, those terms of peace would be called a covenant. The two kings would come together, two governments, and they would come to a deal, if you like, in which the winner or the suzerain would say to the loser, the vassal, here are my terms of peace.

Here is what I'm going to promise you by way of security for the future. And here is what I'm going to demand of you as our vassal.

[5 : 30] And so that made for a resolution of the conflict. And it made for a secure future, both for the winner king and the loser king.

And it meant that, hopefully, if the terms of peace were good, which they often were, that both countries would be able not only to live in peace, but actually to improve relations with one another.

That's how it worked in Old Testament times. And it wasn't just an agreement. It wasn't just a loose agreement. It was a very solemn set of...

They often went through a very solemn ceremony in which blood was... The blood of an animal was spilled. And indeed, when you come on to Abrahamic times, an animal was cut in half.

And there was a ceremony in which the two kings would go through the... walk down the aisle, if you like, together. And they were saying, if either one of us breaks this covenant, let us be like this animal that has been cut in half.

[6 : 32] That was the solemnity of the covenant. And a fascinating, fascinating theme. Not least because the idea of covenant is rooted in God.

That's how God operates. By way of a formal promise bond in which he comes to his people and he says, I am the Lord.

You are my people. Here is what I am promising you. And here is what I am expecting of you. Now, if you put it like that, go through the Old Testament and you'll find that that occurs on several different occasions.

And the first of them is this one. I'm tempted to go through this in greater detail, but I'm going to say this rather cheekily, that if you want to explore this in more detail, sign up for the ETS Saturday course two weeks from today.

And we will be exploring this in great detail all the way through the Bible. I hope you'll forgive me for a plug. But it's all to do with what we're doing and the kind of work that I do.

[7 : 47] Not just for students, but for the whole church. The first of these covenants is found right here. Now, there's some people who say, well, there's no mention of a covenant.

It doesn't tell us in other places in the Bible. There's clear mention that this is a covenant, but not here. But when it bears all the hallmarks of a covenant, then I think we can safely assume with good reason that the covenant exists.

And here it is again. Let me just read it to you once again. The Lord God commanded the man saying, you may eat. Here's the provision that I'm making for you.

Here's the promise that I'm making for you. You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.

There's the prohibition. There's the terms of peace. The terms of agreement between the two of us. That's how God operates. And then he says, for in the day that you shall eat of it, you shall surely die.

[8 : 54] Very often a covenant contained not only a prohibition, but it contained the consequences of breaking the covenant. We have all the hallmarks of this promise bond.

And that forms the basis of our understanding of the arrangement between God and Adam.

One of the objections that I've often heard to Genesis chapter 3 is this. And I've often heard this. Skeptics who come to you and say, well, you know, do you honestly mean, do you honestly mean us to believe that all of the world's problems, all of the world's difficulties, all of the violence and the mistrust and the betrayals and everything happened just because someone ate an apple?

Now, if you put it like that, then it does sound on the surface a bit ridiculous, doesn't it? I can understand when somebody comes and they say that.

And what I would say to that person is, you haven't really understood Genesis chapter 3 or Genesis chapter 2. You've taken a very superficial view of what, and that's the reason, that's part of the reason I wanted to cover this this evening because I think people do take, for one thing, all the focus is on the forbidden fruit, isn't it?

[10 : 23] And when we, when we simply think about the tree of knowledge of good and evil and that's all we think about, then we lose sight of the big picture of Genesis 2 and 3.

There's more to it than that and I think it's worth exploring the bigger picture that is happening. The fact is that Adam was given a choice of one path or another.

The tragedy is that we pay all our attention on the tree of knowledge of good and evil and we forget that there was actually another tree in the middle of the garden.

You find it in verse 9 in chapter 2. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden along with the tree of knowledge and good and evil.

We often think of the tree of knowledge of evil as standing on its own but that's not so. There were two trees in the middle of the garden. The tree of life and the tree of knowledge. Now let that form the basis for your understanding.

[11 : 37] There was the two trees and here's God in this covenant and he says to the man, the first thing he says is you may surely eat of every tree of the garden.

Now you put two and two together and what does that equal? If Adam had made use of the provision that God, the invitation that God had given him to eat of any tree of the garden, every tree of the garden, then, you know what the answer, he would eventually have eaten of the tree of life because the tree of life was one of the rest of the trees.

It's bound to have happened. So God's, God's intention was, God's provision was, his invitation was, that in the course of obedience, if Adam had chosen to obey and just eat of the marvelous fruit that God had given him, he would have eventually eaten the tree of life and by so doing, he would have lived forever.

And you might ask, well, why was this? Well, I'll tell you why. Because man is given free will. He's made in the image of God. He knows the difference between, he knows right, but he's given this command as a test.

It has, it has to be tested because if he's given the ability to choose and to opt for one or the other, then the way to determine which way he's going to go is to test him.

[13 : 19] And so this was the test. But if he had chosen to obey, if he had chosen plan A, if you like, then it would have been a very different outcome, not only for him and Eve, but for the rest of humanity, I believe.

If you want to think about it like this, each tree is a door. You have door one, which is the tree of life.

You have door two, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Now, if you think about it that way, I think it adds a little bit of clarity to the situation. Adam's choice was he either goes through door one or door two, but he doesn't get to come back.

He chooses one or the other. And what his choice is, is for himself and for all of humanity because he stands as what they call the federal head, which means that we were in him.

he represented us, not just himself and his wife. Genesis chapter 3 tells the story of how Adam and Eve chose to enter door two by eating of the forbidden fruit.

[14 : 52] I hope that that clarifies the situation for us and it adds depth to the objection. Oh, well, you're not going to tell me that all the troubles of the world are because somebody ate an apple.

It's not just that at all. This is a solemn covenant. This is a solemn choice. It's an opportunity to exercise his free will one way or the other. In many ways, it doesn't matter what the fruit was or whether it was fruit in the first place.

It so happened to be there cannot be an easier, more clearer option. Nobody could mistake it. What's more, it doesn't get better than the Garden of Eden.

It was no difficult thing for Adam and Eve to simply obey. If they only had obeyed, then they would have opted for the right choice both for themselves and for the rest of humanity.

But it didn't happen that way, did it? It didn't, that's not the way it was because through a process of conversation, this brings me on to the second point I wanted to raise with you, a process of conversation in chapter three, which sees the introduction of the serpent, all kinds of questions in chapter two, chapter one, two, and three.

[16 : 14] I know that Genesis, first chapters of Genesis, they conjure up all kinds of questions. Where did the serpent come from? Who was the serpent? Where did evil come from?

Where is the origin of evil? You read in chapter one, God saw everything that he had made and it was all very good. In that case, where did the presence of evil come from?

That's the most common question everyone asks who wants to know the Bible more. The answer, I don't know. Nobody can give you a definitive answer to that question.

It's one of these areas where you just have to throw up your hands and say, there is so much I can understand about the Bible but it's limited. We have to leave that to God. I do not know where evil is originated but it's there and it's personal.

It takes the form of Lucifer, Satan, whatever you want to call him and he takes the form of a serpent and he comes to Eve in some way.

[17 : 22] I don't know what the serpent looked like. It doesn't matter. He comes to Eve. I would suggest very quickly after God commanded them not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and he embarks on this conversation, the temptation to do exactly what God had forbidden and there are certain features of this conversation that are eerily and scarily similar to the way in which he has operated all down the centuries even today, even maybe even right now in this building.

He's never far away but I want you to notice one or two features about this conversation. First of all, I want you to notice that at no time does the serpent ever tell Eve to eat the fruit.

Do you notice that? At no time does he actually say I think you should eat the fruit because that's not subtle enough and it sort of gives the lie to the idea that we think of temptation as this voice, this little demon on our shoulder and he's whispering to us this is what you should do.

That's not the way it works at all. The way it works is that he began to chip away at the woman's trust in what God had said and it was a slow drip, drip, drip process in which he starts the conversation in a plausible manner and says to Eve you know how God said what was that he said?

He said you can't eat any of the tree of the garden again. Remind me again. She says it's about that we mustn't touch the tree in the middle of the garden of the tree of the good and evil and at that point he seizes the opportunity to chip even further and he says actually in actual fact things are not the way that God is presenting them to you.

[19 : 25] You're not going to surely die. He knows that the day you eat it you'll become like him. that's what he wants to prevent you from better things.

And you see what he's doing? He's chipping away and he's undermining her trust in the bare word of God alone. and it works because as the conversation proceeds her mind is wandering away from that position where she accepted or where Adam accepted the simple command of God not to go not to touch not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

I think you know what this is about don't you? You know this voice at least I do. it works in different ways according to our circumstances where you are this evening.

The serpent's been doing this. This is the first time he did it to a man and a woman but he's been doing it for centuries ever since and he's doing it probably even tonight. even as we speak perhaps some of you open the Bible and say is this really true?

Is this really true? Is this really the basis of our understanding of the human race? I mean look at all these eminent scientists that are telling us that we can do away with God because we know so much more now in the 21st century.

[21 : 09] We're so advanced in our understanding of science and surely this belongs to the Middle Ages belongs to the past.

Some of you have probably heard this in your place of work or perhaps even people in your family have said to you are you serious about this?

You still believe? That word still is really painful isn't it? You still believe? And it gets to you.

it gets to you. Can I be personal the way it gets to me? I'm coming to the sort of senior end of life.

I'm there. Senior end of life. And the voice I hear very often is what have you done with your life?

[22 : 08] you spent all these years following Jesus albeit rather badly. You haven't made a very good job of it.

But that's just an aside. You follow Jesus. Look at what you could have done. Look at all these people who have decided to go on different paths than you.

Are they all getting struck by lightning? No. They're all thriving. They're having a great time, far better time than you are choosing all the difficulty of ministry and being involved in the church and following Jesus instead of just making the most of life.

You know what you've done? You're only going to live once and you've blown it. Exactly the same thing. Chipping away.

the word of God. That's how he does it. How does he do it for you? How does he do it for you? Probably in a similar way.

[23 : 15] What do I do about it? How do I respond to that voice? Well I come straight back to the Bible. And I discover actually in the Bible that I'm strangely not alone.

If you read Psalm 73, it's the most remarkable testimony in which the psalmist, he goes through exactly the same process and conversation as I've just described.

And he tells us that the wicked are thriving. They're happy. They're not suffering in any way. And here he is.

following God in vain. And now there's a turning point in Psalm 73 where he says, then I went into the house of God.

And the moment I went into the house of God, I saw things from an entirely different perspective. That's what we need to do. my dear friends, when we are overcome by those voices of doubt, we must take refuge in the word of God alone that tells us who we are and it tells us where our hope and our promise and our assurance lies in God's word alone.

[24 : 43] that's what we're here for, isn't it? We don't have anything yet. I mean, how else when you think of the most impossible prospect, which is the resurrection of the dead, that's what God promises.

He says, I am the resurrection of the life. He believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. We believe that. Why would we believe that?

Because God has said it. that's all. The bare word of God alone. Now, I must hurry up. Then the third thing is that, of course, you know the rest of the story, the rest literally is history.

The woman took the fruit, and by the way, Adam was as culpable as Eve was. She was the first. Somebody had to be the first. Well, so be it. But the moment that Eve took the fruit, everything changed.

The whole environment changed. Light became darkness. Sweetness became bitterness. Security became fear. Peace became turmoil.

[25 : 52] Outside and inside, they knew that they all of a sudden discovered that they were naked. Whereas beforehand, in a perfect world, that was immaterial. It didn't matter because God had created them that way.

There was no need for clothing. Now they're full of shame and embarrassment. They pathetically sow fig leaves for themselves and they hide from God. It only gets worse as the chapter proceeds.

God comes into the garden in the cool of the day. They know it's going to happen because it's happened before. Beforehand, they've had no problem with God. God has been their delight.

They've looked forward to him coming in and to every conversation that they've had, every opportunity of fellowship with God. They said, yes, Lord, we want you to come in now.

They don't want to see him. They don't want him anywhere near them. And yet, he's going to come in in the cool of the day. It's interesting. Just a little bit of an aside here.

[26 : 51] When it tells us that the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, well, God, that's an anthropomorphism when God describes himself in human terms because God doesn't, he doesn't have legs to walk, but that doesn't matter.

We know what's being said. But the other question here in this verse is the cool of the day. Be very careful, very careful. This is why we teach our students Hebrew, by the way.

It's not that cool of the day is not correct, but there's maybe a better way of putting it and something that is a bit more, more, more, that will fit the context.

The cool of the day, walking in the garden, sort of gives the impression that God comes in blissfully unaware of what's happened. He's going for a quiet stroll in the garden, and he doesn't see Adam at first, and he says, Adam, where are you?

that's not the way it was. You'll notice there's a footnote that says the wind of the day.

[28 : 04] This was not some kind of innocuous walk. walk. It wasn't a stroll. This was judgment.

This was an angry creator who was righteously, exceedingly angry at the fact that his image has deliberately disobeyed him, and he has every right to be angry, and he seeks them out, and he calls them out, and he begins the process of interrogation, and he has three things to say.

When he hears Adam and his pathetic excuse, he says, what have you done? Have you eaten of the fruit that I told you not to eat? Adam immediately, first case of passing the buck in history, when he blames his wife, God turns to her, he says, what's this you have done?

She passes the buck to the, it's a classic case of refusing to take responsibility, if ever there was a mark of sinful behavior, sinful human nature, it is that we refuse to take responsibility for what we have done.

It was a serpent, she says, that deceived me, and I ate. And so therefore, God turns to the serpent, and he says, he then decides to say three things in judgment, he talks to the serpent, then he takes to this woman, and he talks to the man.

[29 : 40] I'm going to take these in reverse order, simply because if I do so, we will end on a note of hope. hope. What he says to the man is two things.

There are two edges to what he says to Adam. There's the edge of judgment, but perhaps surprisingly, hidden in this judgment, there is grace.

Where do I see that? Well, what he says to the man, he says, because you have listened to the voice of your wife, verse 17, and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you, shall not curse the ground because of you.

In pain, you shall eat of it. Now, the good news is, you shall eat. In other words, you're going to continue to exist. to be with difficulty.

Whereas beforehand, when you planted seed in the ground, it grew. In a perfect world, if you planted seed in the ground, it will yield 100%, and without any kind, now you are going to have frustration after frustration.

[30 : 55] And like I said last night, these are the first fruit, these are the symbols of all the difficulty that was going to arise, the things that go wrong, either minor inconveniences or major catastrophes, natural disaster, it's all contained in these words.

In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles, it shall bring forth to you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. Yet, you shall eat.

Do you remember? Do you see that? He's repeating himself twice. You shall eat. It's what we call common grace. It's how theologians explain the fact that God allows life to continue and very often to thrive in a sinful world.

It's a sign of God's kindness, making the sun to shine on the righteous and the unrighteous, and the rain to rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, in the words of Jesus.

But then to the woman, he says this. He says, I will surely multiply you. Two things. He was going to multiply her pain and child bearing.

[32 : 09] That was going to be a mark of the consequence that she had to suffer by way of her part in the disobedience. It was to become a feature of the human race, that whereas animals with relative ease gave birth to their offspring, the woman was to do so in pain.

I have no direct knowledge of course of this. I can only talk about having witnessed the birth of my six children from afar, but it is true. It's true, isn't it?

But then he says this, your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over. What does this mean? Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over us.

what it means is that whereas there was perfectly balanced desire for him before now, there is a distorted, exaggerated dependence on him now.

And the rule that he would have had before now, which was a loving, balanced rule, would now become a monstrous one.

[33 : 20] or might become a monster. Again, if it wasn't for God's common grace that restrains us sometimes more than others. So what God is saying is that whereas beforehand you had a perfect equilibrium in your relationship with each other, now that's all spoiled.

And your view of him is going to change and his view of you is going to change and it's all going to become ugly. Again, to a lesser or greater extent. Let me give you an example of that.

I know the time is going. Let me give you an example of this. Later on in chapter 4, we go into the next chapter and chapter 4 as the human race develops and as more people are born and as things happen, you come across this nasty character called Lamech.

Chapter 4, verse 23. And he marries two women. Well, that was a red flag for a start. One of them is called Ada and the other one called Zilha.

A nasty, nasty piece of work. Right? And he kills a man. But it's not just that. He wants to boast about it to his wives and he says to them, Ada, Zilha, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech, listen to what I've said.

[34 : 36] I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. What's this? What's the idea here? The idea I believe is an exact fulfillment of what God said to Eve.

That here is a man and he is threatening his wives and he's saying to them, see what I've done to this guy. Just be careful.

Domestic abuse didn't start in the 21st century. It started way back then. But what I want to end with is God's word to the serpent.

Not only was the serpent to crawl on the ground forever as a mark of what God had said to him. I don't want to spend any time on that.

I want to spend all the time on the next bit, the second bit where he says I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. I'm going to split the human race in two.

[35 : 48] There's going to be race number one which is going to serve me, the seed of the woman, and race number two which is going to serve you, the seed of the serpent.

They were both going to look like sometimes two people in the same family were born. The seed of the woman, seed of the serpent. Seed of the woman followed the Lord. Seed of the serpent followed the serpent.

I'm going to split the human race. And as you read all the way through the Old Testament, it becomes very clear who belonged to which. He says there are going to be enmity between them, there's going to be war, there's going to be conflict between these two types of human being, those who follow me and those who follow you.

But it's going to end, and here's how it's going to end, because he says it will culminate one day in a man.

The reason I know that is because the masculine singular is used in verse 15. He, he, he shall bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.

[37 : 03] He'll you. You know what this is, don't you? It's the first glimpse, the first glimmer. It's the wrath remembering mercy.

It's God's solution to an otherwise hopeless, catastrophic event that would have ruined the world forever, ever.

And yet here is God and he's saying, yes, I'm going to judge you. Yes, you're going to suffer. There's going to be untold suffering in the human race, but nevertheless, he will bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

And you know when that happened. You know who the he is. The he is Jesus Christ, the son of God who was going to come into the world as the second Adam or the last Adam, some people prefer to call him.

And by so representing his people, he was going to reverse. How was he going to do it? He was going to crush the head of the serpent in his death on the cross.

[38 : 14] By so doing, he has to go through death by which the serpent will bruise his heel. one. And that leads us nicely, I hope, into tomorrow, God willing, where we are going to look at the death of Jesus in terms of his victory over the evil one as demonstrated in the temptation.

But so much of what I said tonight, I hope, resonates with all of us. We have an enemy. It goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

and using the same kind of tactics, chipping away of the word of God. And tonight, I hope that our coming here together will be as laying hold as never before on the bare word of God alone and resting in the he, the seed of the woman who is going to come and one day give his life for us and thus bruise the head of the serpent.

He's got the victory. And in him, we have the victory. And God promises that in his son. Our father in heaven, we thank you for our time together and we ask that you will bless your word to us, bless us as we prepare for to sit at your table and remember the death of Jesus.

In his name, amen. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a close by singing in Psalm 103, verse 3.

[39 : 50] It's the Scottish Psalters, page 369, and it's verse 3. All thine iniquities who doth most graciously forgive, who thy diseases all and pains doth heal and thee relieve.

And then on to verse verse 8. Psalm 103, all thine iniquities who doth please stand if you're able. Amen. Psalm 103, doth please put iniquities who put iniquities who put iniquities who CHOIR SINGS

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS O sufferer in counsel to us, in mercy, pectinus.

Amen. Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with each one of you, both now and always. Amen.

Amen.