

A Good Creation Gone Bad, Part 1
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The goal this year is to walk through, and go through, the story of God's grace as it unfolds in scripture from beginning to end. You know, there's a number of aspects to that. One of it is that our goal is by the end of the year we will all be better equipped to tell that story ourselves, comprehensively and yet concisely. And so there's kind of an educative goal that's designed here. But there's another goal involved, and that is we are filled as we read that story, and it unfolds before us in scripture, we are filled with wonder at the glory and the mystery of Jesus and what He accomplished, and we see it in the context, the great and amazing story that unfolds in scripture. So that's where we're headed this year, and that's what our studies will be about as we go through the school year on Sunday mornings in our preaching schedule.

Today we're at the point where we start the very beginning. We kind of gave an overview last week. Today we're gonna start the story, and the biblical story of God's grace begins with the story of a good creation gone bad, a gloriously good creation, a creation we saw last week in which the Father and Son rejoiced in the creative event. They enjoyed it immensely, and the angelic host shouted with joy as creation was brought into being! Out of nothing God spoke, and there was something glorious and good—all of creation. And we saw that, and it's a good creation. And yet we read by the end of the time we get to the end of the story, far off in the future, ahead of us even, the end of the story in the book of Revelation for some reason things have gone so bad in that glorious, good creation, it is so filled with death and with misery and with suffering that God...God destroys it! The good and glorious creation is destroyed, and God brings into being a new heavens and a new earth.

Now somehow as we see that storyline we can kinda sense it, because we do sense this is a good creation. This time of year I think it's one of my favorite times of year. There's three others...winter, spring, and summer, but this is one of my favorite times of year. I just love this, that beautiful color display that's just out there astounds you, and it just overwhelms you. It's almost sensory overload, the colors, and it's just so fantastic! Marlene and I went down to the hay flats. We were gonna go on this walk yesterday. And we don't do that often, but the colors are out, and you look across the valley, and Pioneer Peak and everything else, but there'd been a high tide and there was so much mud we couldn't walk very far. But it was still beautiful. Ok? I just love it.

On the other hand, we know somethin's gone wrong. All you have to do is pick up the newspaper after that glorious walk in the fall colors and see a picture of men, with the best technology available, going through the back yard of a California home looking for the bodies of women who'd been murdered. Somethin's gone wrong.

I find that we're not always sure exactly what happened. Our culture definitely isn't sure; and we, even as Christians, sometimes are confused when we try to answer the question, 'What exactly happened?' And then I'm convinced that very few if any really understand how bad it really is. So over the next two weeks what we're gonna do is break it out into two parts. This week we're gonna see what happened. Next week we're gonna come back and answer the question, 'How bad is it really'. That's what we're gonna do over the next two weeks.

We're gonna start today with just simply answering the question, 'What happened? How did it go wrong?' And it's amazing when I answer that question, and you look at that question, the way the Bible answers it. The Bible answers it with a very simple, simple reality...a choice was made. That's the answer to the question, 'What happened'. A choice was made generations ago; generations upon generations ago a choice was made. And when the Bible outlines that event, that choice, that point in time when a decision was made that has affected every one of us in this room, when that decision was made...the Bible goes back and accounts for that, and explains and describes that incident. It does so so clearly, so concisely, and so concretely that I think that the best way to go back and see what happened is kinda do it 'old-school'. You simply go back and read the account. We're gonna put the PowerPoint technology at a minimum level today. We're not gonna get real analytical with the text. We're not gonna sit here and provide a superimposed outline over it. And we're not gonna try and trace all the philosophical implications of it. All we're gonna do is look at the choice being made as it's described in scripture. I think it's important to do that, because when the question comes up, 'What happened? Why is there evil around us in this grand and glorious creation?' we become so analytical, we become so speculative, we get so involved in philosophy, that pretty soon we lose the reality of what actually happened. We forget the story. So let's go back and look at it.

Genesis chapter 3—I'm gonna encourage you to turn in your Bibles there with me. And like we did last week, we're not gonna do this every week, but this week again we're gonna read an extended portion of scripture. Gonna give you a couple statements by way of preparation before we read. Number one is it's gonna be a little strange as you read it. Ok? It is gonna start off strange right at the beginning. There's a snake that talks. Ok? And because of the strangeness, our temptation is to begin to read this as probably an ancient legend. And in fact it's the type of thing you often can find in ancient mythology, a story that's kind of out of the ordinary, that people told to explain different phenomena. For example, maybe this story we are told was ancient mythology explaining why snakes crawl, why human beings and snakes don't get along, why women have pain in childbirth, why there's thorns and weeds, and why we die. These are just stories kinda to explain that ancient mythology passed on around campfires, especially to children.

I'm gonna caution you against reading this story that way. The reason being, is Jesus didn't read this story that way. When Jesus read the books of Moses, in which this story is found, Jesus read these stories as the word of God, the truth, the reality, and He taught them that way. It's as if we look back and we see all the ancient myths and all the various stories, and we kinda dismiss 'em all. But Jesus says, 'No, there's one you need to listen to. It's the truth.' So it's gonna be strange, but listen to it as truth.

Secondly, it's gonna be very, very sparse. In fact, I think it's surprisingly sparse. I'm astounded that when we ask the question, 'What happened', God can answer it in a story this short, with as few details as there are. And I think that's purposeful. There's gonna be things in here that you'll wanna say, 'Tell me more about that, especially this talking snake. It doesn't seem like a normal snake.' And you're not told anything more about it in the story. Later on it'll come up in the biblical story. You'll see other things in the story that you kinda wonder about, and you won't be given a full explanation. That's ok. A number of these things, it's like watching one of the opening scenes in a movie, and there's things in there that you don't know what they're all about, but down the road they'll figure in the story very important. And that's the case here. Don't worry about answering all the questions in here, because there's one central thing that it wants you to see, and you need to see that.

Lastly, the setting. Ok? One, it's a bit strange, it's very sparse. Let me give you the setting before we actually read it. God has created a glorious and wondrous creation. He has created a man and a woman, and He has put them in a beautiful, beautiful garden setting called the Garden of Eden, where it's lush, it's beautiful, it's wonderful. They have anything and everything they could ever want. It is glorious! He has put them there. In the middle of that garden there's two trees. One is called the Tree of Life, and it's the source of life for those that would eat of it. And then there's a tree called the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And we'll have more to say about that in a bit, but with that tree there is a directive. There is a command. God says, 'Don't eat of it. When you do, you'll die. You can eat everything else out here. You can have the run of the garden. In fact, I'm causing things to grow so you can enjoy them. But don't eat of that tree or you will die.' And then there's an odd comment at the end of the chapter. It says they were both naked, Adam and Eve; they were both naked and not ashamed. That'll come up later. Let's read the story.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from the tree of the garden'?"

'Did God say that?'

And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!"

'It's not gonna happen. You're not gonna die. And here's why.'

"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God; you will know good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave it also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

And they heard the sound of YAHWEH God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

And God replies. He said to him,

“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” And the man said, “The woman You gave to me, the woman you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, tricked me, and I ate.”

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity, animosity, between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel.”

And to the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them.

Then the LORD said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

Not just ‘sent him out.’

He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

That’s what happened. The center...the centerpiece of the story, the hinge point, the thing that Moses wants to make sure we see and we know about the whole story...not necessarily the identity of the serpent, even kind of the interesting “Who’s the ‘us’ ” when God says, “...like Us”; it’s not addressed here. What needs to be seen is the very centerpiece of what happened. In verse 6 of chapter 3 “...*she took from its fruit...*”, the action slows down here to cover every single movement. “*She took from its fruit...*”, the tree they were told ‘*Do not eat from that tree,*’ she took from its fruit, and she ate. And she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. The Bible, by the way, never goes back and isolates her out of this and says it’s just her problem. The two of ‘em together ate. That’s what happened. A clear directive from the creator God was disobeyed.

Now out of that happens other things. For one, we’re told that they came to know good and evil. Interesting statement... they came to know good and evil. See, up to this point they had only known good. They’d been in a beautiful, wondrous creation, and they’d been in a beautiful, wondrous garden; and the relationship had been so good between them and between God, they had only known good. Now they knew good and evil. In a way they were like God—they knew good and evil. But they knew it in a different way than God knows good and evil. See, God knows good and evil like a doctor knows cancer, like a specialist who analyses it and understands it, and studies it his entire career and knows how to treat it and what effects it has on the body, and every aspect of cancer he knows it inside and out. He knows cancer, but he knows it differently than a cancer patient knows it. God knows good and evil. Adam and Eve now knew good, and they knew evil, and they knew it as a cancer patient knows cancer. In fact, I would use a different analogy. They knew it like a meth addict knows meth. A chemist can understand it. He knows it, and he knows all the biochemical effects of ingesting that drug into your system, and he understands what it does, and what the effects are, and dealt with the after effects and everything else; but he knows it differently than the meth addict who takes it; and not only knows it, but now is drawn to it. Adam and Eve now knew good, *and they knew evil*. And they’re now drawn to it. Something happened when they crossed that line into disobedience.

Interesting; it says when they ate of the fruit their eyes were opened and they felt shame. They realized they were naked, and they felt shame. And they were afraid then, also, of God. And people wonder, well, was there something magical about that fruit they ate? No. They crossed the line of obedience. And it changed them.

There's a statement in Titus [Titus 1:15] that sheds some insight here. And it reads like this. It says to the pure all things are pure.

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

When they laid hold of that fruit and they ate it, they crossed the line from faith and obedience into unbelief and wickedness, and they were defiled. And the human body, which to that point had been pure in front of them, now became impure in their eyes. They would never again be able to look at things that are pure and see the purity. Be tainted with consciences and minds that are defiled. So they took of the fruit, they ate, and they came to know good and evil.

There's other things that unfold in the story. The snake is cursed. It is told that it'll never, ever rise up from the dust. It's always gonna crawl and eat dust. It's told that there's always gonna be an animosity 'between you and the seed, the descendants of the woman.' And then the woman is told that there's a curse that comes upon her specifically as a woman. There's gonna be greater pain in childbirth. Ok? And I know...my wife recently got some kind of video thing that proved how the greatest pain is what women go through in childbirth, and us men are clueless, ok? That wasn't my choice. Ok? And it wasn't your choice. It came from this choice.

And then the odd statement that says, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." And this is the only time I'm gonna get a little analytical here, because people have spent a lot of time on that verse, trying to say "What's exactly going on there?" and it really is kinda interesting, because the word for desire in the Hebrew there has the idea beyond simply "I desire this" as kind of a sexual attraction or a desire to enjoy something. There's the idea "I desire for this to be mine, for me to have it my way, for me to have this man and be the man I want him to be, and do what I want him to do. I want him to be my man, as the man I want him to be." And God says, 'You're gonna have that desire; but at the same time the man is gonna rule over you', and it's not a positive word here. He's gonna rule, and at the very core of human relations in marriage there came an unbelievable tension. You didn't choose it; I didn't choose it. There was a choice made long ago.

Then He says to the man, 'You are going to...the land is now cursed. It's cursed. And you are going to have to fight weeds, and have to fight thorns, and you're gonna have to fight thistles the rest of your life. And you're gonna have to toil and work in order to survive.' Ok? This is why I look at lawns and say they're futile. They're futile! They're futile, ok? They're cursed! Ok? It's gonna be weeds and thorns and thistles, ok? It says 'you are gonna work the ground until you die. And then you're gonna go right back into the ground.'

And then God drives 'em out of that beautiful, wonderful garden, and He made sure that there's no way for them to come back in and eat of the Tree of Life. They die. It's a death that took place that day, that moment, but like a tree branch that has been cut off from the tree. It stays green for a while, but it's dead; it's cut off from the source of life, and it dies. That's what happened.

It's interesting when you go along through scripture; it doesn't directly elaborate a whole lot on this event. There's not a whole lot of expansion expressly about all the dynamics of what happened that time and that place. There's things that you begin to realize, and you trace back and you say, "Whoa! That goes back to this!" In fact, when you go back through the whole Bible and you try to find what's the most exact commentary analysis of what took place that day, you don't find it 'til you're all the way in the New Testament, after Jesus Christ has come and died and raised again, and He's explaining things to His apostles. It isn't until then that you have the Apostle Paul writing an explanation, a grand picture of what the gospel's all about, goes back and gives us a more detailed commentary of what exactly happened that day in that garden. And when he gets to it he puts it like this in Romans 5:12. And I'm just gonna pull two phrases here. We're gonna come back to this chapter later. But when he comes to that chapter he makes this statement. He says, "*Through one man,*" talking about Adam as he sat there and responded to the invitation, the offering of the meal...or the fruit...he says, "*Through one man sin entered the world.*" Up to that point it was not there. But sin...lawlessness, if you wanna use that phrase, rebellion, resistance, if you wanna use those phrases; if you wanna simply use the word 'disobedience' use that...it entered the world the moment they crossed that line and ate of the tree. And death came through that sin. And every one of us have felt the impact in tragedies we've experienced, situations we've read of and looked at. But deep in the core of our beings we have experienced this.

Later in this same chapter, and we'll come back to this next week, the Apostle Paul says through that one man's disobedience, that one moment in the garden, the many, all of us, were made sinners. I didn't choose it; you didn't choose it. The choice was made back then. I didn't choose to move to America and be raised in this country. My grandfather made that choice years ago. I didn't come into the world choosing to be a sinner; that choice was made long ago.

We're gonna go on next week and we're gonna look at just how bad things are. And this is no fun. But before we do I need to pause here, because right here it's bad enough in my eyes. So let me give you some glimpses of hope as we finish, three quick glimpses of hope. One is that kinda odd statement to the snake that says 'You know what? The descendant of the woman is gonna crush your head. Not your descendant's head, but your head, even as you bruise His heel.' There's somethin' goin' on there, and there's hope there. The snake is gonna be dealt with.

Secondly, there's hope, amazing hope; God has given a simple way to deal with that tension that is woven in between man and woman in a marriage relationship. God has given a very simple way to deal with that, very simple way. It's found in the teaching of the New Testament—Woman, respect your husband. Honor him for who he is. Don't try to make him what he's not. And submit to him. And Husband, you love that wife. There is a way to deal with the curse in marriage.

And lastly, and this is the most glorious of all, the choice made in that garden so long ago was answered by God with another choice made in another garden long after, when His Son, sweating drops of blood, wrestling all alone with the tempter, cries out to the Father, "Not My will, but Yours." Our hope is not rooted in education. It is not rooted in finding another better set of moral laws to impose on the world around us. It is not rooted in the moral development of humanity. It is not rooted in our determination to be better people. Our hope is rooted in one, simple choice made, when sin was answered with a greater grace, and Jesus said, 'I will go to the cross. I will obey.'

We head out into a world, as we said last week, where there's ever-increasing sin. Our challenge, our call, is to answer that with the even greater grace, the wonder, and the glory of Jesus Christ, who would make the right choice at the right time for us.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in that truth, and enjoy that grace. Amen.