

The Image Spoiled

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- [0 : 00] This is the third in our series of what the Bible says about being human. We've already looked at humanity in relation to God. Humanity is the image of God.
- We looked last week at relationships, humanity, male, female, in relation to each other. And today we come to the spoiling of the image. And we're reading in Genesis chapter 3, which begins on page 2.
- So let's read the chapter. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?
- And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden.
- Neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die. God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.
- [1 : 13] So when the woman saw the tree was good for food, that it was a light to the eyes, that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.
- And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.
- And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord 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.
- But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And Adam said, I heard the sound of you in the garden. And I was afraid, because I was naked.
- And I hid myself. God said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, the woman who you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.
- [2 : 22] And the Lord God said to the woman, what is this that you have done? The woman said, the serpent deceived me, and I ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, because you have done this, curse are you above all livestock, and above all beasts of the field.
- On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.
- He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you will bring forth children.
- Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.
- Curse 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 for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.

[3 : 34] While the sweat of your face you shall eat bread. Till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever.

Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Lord God, as we read these words, perhaps familiar to many of us, we pray that they will come with a new and powerful relevance into our lives.

[4 : 53] We realize that this is where we're reading about the event that could have spoiled the whole story. The event which could have totally destroyed our humanity.

And yet we know that you have things to teach us. We believe you have things to say to us that we need to hear. And so help us in these next moments to listen, to consider carefully what you are saying to us, and to realize once again the wonder and the power of the gospel and of our salvation.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. And so the week when everything went right is followed by the day when everything went wrong.

And this could easily have brought the story to an abrupt halt. That it's only the grace of God that it didn't bring the story to an abrupt halt.

First thing I want to say is it's a beautifully told story. It doesn't waste words. It's brief. It's concise. There's the abrupt introduction of the serpent.

[6 : 08] We haven't heard about him before. And he's simply introduced into the story. There's a clever sowing of suggestions in Eve's mind.

There's the wimpish behavior of Adam who fails to, who fails completely. And then there is a crashing realization that nothing will ever be the same.

Everything has changed. And everything has changed for the worse and not the better. Now the second thing, is this just nostalgia for a golden age?

All in the traditions, in the stories, in the mythology of every nation, there are stories of a mythical golden age. A kind of longing for a better world.

I want to make clear that this is a story of a real event. There was an Adam and there was an Eve. That does not mean, of course, that every detail in the story is literal.

[7 : 12] There's a lot of figurative language. And by the way, sometimes when people hear the words figurative language, they think that that saying is not actually true. It's nothing of the sort.

Figurative language is poetic language. Picture, metaphor. To help us to get more deeply into an event. After all, nothing like this has ever happened before.

Nothing like this will ever happen again. And therefore, we need to respond to it imaginatively. And the other thing is, Paul, in Romans chapter 5, sees this as a historical event.

He says, as but through one man, sin came into the world, and death by sin. And therefore, death has passed upon everyone, for all have sinned.

Now, you see, he's not saying this is just an illustration. He's not saying, read that old story at the beginning of the Bible, because it's an illustration of what human beings are like. He's saying, this is how it happened.

[8 : 18] By one man, sin came into the world. Now, when the reformers talked about this, they talked about total depravity. Now, that doesn't mean, they didn't mean by that, that everyone or everything is as bad as it could possibly be.

What they meant was that since the fall, everything has an inbuilt bias to go wrong. Everything has the tendency to fall into sin.

And the fall here, descent from created goodness to our sinful state and our fallen state. And it's very important to realize, as I say, that this is an event.

If this is not a historical event, we left loads of problems. How did sin come into the world? How did death come into the world?

Why do we need the cross and the resurrection to deal with both? You see, if we lose the first Adam, we lose the last Adam. It's as serious as that.

[9 : 25] A historical fall needed a historical salvation. That is the point. See, there's pictorial language and lots of, I mean, we're not going to take time to deal with all the details.

We're going to spend weeks, months, years on this chapter and never exhausted. I want to say one or two things. Humanity fell because it was tempted from outside.

I think that's a very, very important point. Human beings didn't just suddenly go off the rails. They didn't just suddenly decide to go wrong. They were tempted by the serpent.

Now, the serpent, the word for serpent here, is not the usual word for snake. It's the word that's used of the hostile powers of darkness.

The word that's used of Leviathan, the sea monster, in Job and in some of the Psalms. Interesting, the ancient Hebrews regarded the sea as a place of danger and darkness.

[10 : 30] After all, the two people who go to sea in the scriptures, Jonah and Paul, manage to get shipwrecked. It's not, you can't imagine one of the biblical authors saying with John Masefield, I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky.

So, this is a hostile power. And in the book of Revelation, we read this, Revelation 12, verse 9. The great dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray.

So, it's a real hostile power who uses his influence to distort the word of God. Did God actually say? You can sense the cynicism, the mockery in his voice.

What kind of a god is it who's putting these restrictions? After all, it's very nasty of him.

It's very rigid of him. And why is he not allowing you to eat every tree? Now, you can see, of course, what he's doing. He's turning the one prohibition into a bullying negative.

[11 : 40] The Lord said you can eat of all the trees except this one. So, what does he focus on? This one. And like children's talk, I've sometimes seen given where someone holds up a white sheet and in the middle of it is a black spot.

You ask the children, what do they see? Almost inevitably, they'll say, a black spot. It isn't this characteristic of fallen humanity. The one negative, the one prohibition, the one forbidden thing is the thing we are irresistibly drawn to.

And the devil is a liar. Jesus says that he is a liar from the beginning, from here, from this story, from this episode in Genesis chapter 3.

Of course, this story has been very badly handled by many people. Some people telling us, they say it's just a fable or a myth.

Others trying to say every single last detail here must be literal. Trouble is, you see, when the devil comes across a doctrine that's likely to do him damage, whether it's about creation or whether it's about the coming again of Jesus, the devil raises up shills of cranks and weirdos to preach and teach and write about it.

[12 : 59] And that's what's happened with this story, as it's happened with the other end of the story. From here, right on, the devil is a liar.

But he's a very clever liar. That is the point. So, the fall of humanity is not, as I say, something that one day they get up and decide we're going to be disobedient.

It's a temptation that comes from the outside. Now, what's God doing when all this is happening? Why is God allowing this?

I want you to look at verse 15. And we'll come back to this, but God says, I will put enmity, that's to the serpent, between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Very important to see, actually, what this verse exactly says. The Lord doesn't say there will be enmity between you and the woman.

[14 : 04] He says, I will put enmity. You see what he's saying? He says, I'm going to be on the woman's side, on the side of her descendants, against the devil. If God initiates a battle, he's going to win it.

That is the point. So, this great battle begins here. The battle between the serpent and the descendants of the woman is initiated by God.

So, there is already glimmers of hope here in this chapter. So, the first thing, then, is this sin, this departure, comes not from an inner tendency, but from an evil power outside.

And, by the way, just in passing, very important to distinguish three things. Evil, which is the power that comes from outside. Sin, which is what happens when we respond to that evil.

And, fallenness, which is what happens to all of us because we live in a fallen and broken world. Very important to realize that. Because far too many people, far too many Christians, think that their suffering and so on is as a result of their sinfulness.

[15 : 18] More often than not, it's as a result of fallenness. And, I think that's very important to realize because otherwise, we're going to see God as a tyrant.

We're going to be hag-ridden with guilt. And, we're never going to make any progress in our Christian living. That's the first thing. The fall comes from outside.

Secondly, the fall results in broken relationships. Now, we saw last week, the very essence of being human in the image of God was harmonious relationships.

Man and woman together are the image made for each other. And, notice the first thing happens not when Adam and Eve fall out with each other, but when they conspire together against God.

And, that is the point. Their relationship with each other is spoiled because of the breaking of the relationship with God. And, this is where the whole business of the image of God, relationship with God, relationship with each other comes together.

[16 : 22] How is this going to be shown? Well, first of all, it's going to be shown in the bearing of children. Verse 16, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

In pain you shall bring forth children. Now, obviously, that's associated first and foremost with the pains of pregnancy. But, clearly, it's saying a bit more than that.

It's saying that these families whom we produce will not only be a source of great happiness, but a source of great problems. I said last week, families are the source both of our greatest happiness, and sometimes of our greatest unhappiness.

This is what's happened. It's important to see what God is saying. He's not saying from now on, you won't be able to have children.

That's very important. I might have brought the story from an abrupt end and a very short Bible, and there you go. The point is, you are still going to be able to have children.

[17 : 26] You are still going to be able to fill the world with the images of God. That is the point. But, it's going to be associated now with pain, with suffering, with hardship.

Both the initial bearing of the children and the problems arise out of families. Now, notice the second part of that verse, verse 16. Your desire shall be for your husband.

He shall rule over you. A breakdown of the husband-wife relationship. Instead of love and cherish, there's going to be desire and dominate.

That is the point. Now, that does not mean that every marriage is going to go badly wrong.

Obviously, it doesn't. What it means is, just as in the case of families, even the happiest families are going to have problems. Even the most fulfilled marriages are going to have problems.

[18 : 24] Because we live in a fallen world. And because we are sinful. And the important thing to remember is that even in the fallen world, it is still God's will for humans to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth.

It is still God's will for male and female to be together. That is the point. God has not set aside his purpose. It's important to remember that. And when God and your desire shall be, he shall rule over you.

And this, of course, reminds us that so often male-female relationships have gone bad. Male chauvinism with its inevitable counterpart of strident feminism.

This is what so often happens. When people see male and female as rivals, rather than as companions together in the image of God, then huge problems arise.

As I said last week, it's so important in any community that there are male and female. It's not just about marriage. It's about the whole business of human relationships.

[19 : 37] And I think that we must remember that that's gone bad as well. But notice there are gleams of hope even here.

First thing is the verse 8. The Lord God walking in the garden. You notice he doesn't wash his hands of them. And this phrase, walking, is a phrase that suggests habitual activity.

And that remains God's purpose. We read in chapter 5 of this book, Enoch walked with God. Read in chapter 6 that Noah walked with God. And in the New Testament, that's one of the phrases that's used to describe the Christian life.

Walking with God. And so this continues in the fallen world. God's still calling people to walk with him. Then look at verse 20.

The man called his wife's name Eve. And Eve means living. Life will eventually triumph. Life will triumph over death.

[20 : 44] It doesn't look like that at the moment. So the breakdown of relationships in families is real. But there is hope.

Because grace can redo what sin has done. That's the point. We cannot go back to Eden.

There is no possibility of going back to Eden. That's always been a kind of fantasy of people. Go back to an earlier age. And of course there is a certain attraction.

I remember my childish enjoyment of watching Jurassic Park. And so on. But we cannot go back either to Eden or to Jurassic Park. We can only go forward.

So that's the second thing. Broken relationships. Now the third thing is the spoiled environment. We noticed that last week. One of the reasons for creating Adam and Eve.

[21 : 45] And placing them in Eden. Was to Edenize the world. Now instead of Edenizing the world. It's going to become a wasteland. Notice that verse 17.

Cursed is the ground because of you. The breakdown of the harmony. Between humans and creation. Creation. And that of course.

That of course is. We can see it all around us in the fallen world. There are beautiful things in the fallen world. There are sunrises. There's moonlight. There's woodlands. There's rivers.

In many of the Psalms. There's praise of the beauty of the created order. And remember all the Psalms inevitably are written in the fallen world. And there's also dust bowls.

There's earthquakes. There's fallen waves. There's tidal waves. There's cancer. There's death. You see these. The breakdown of harmony is never complete.

[22 : 47] But it is there. And Paul develops this in Romans 8. Paul says in Romans 8 that creation, when he personifies, is longing. Standing on tiptoe is the word he uses.

Waiting to be released from the curse. And that's the word he uses, this curse. And he says only when the children of God are fully like Christ can creation be fully released.

Because the destiny of redeemed humans is to rule the earth. God hasn't changed his mind. The destiny of Adam and Eve was to rule the earth. As I said last week, we mustn't have pedantic literal images of sitting on thrones with golden crowns.

The ruling the earth is the ancient mandate of caring for God's new creation. As it was at the beginning. Then there's the frustration of work.

Verse 18, by the sweat of your face. Verse 18, you shall eat bread. Work is a good thing in itself. There was work in Eden.

[23 : 56] There will be work in the new creation. But work is also today associated with frustration. That doesn't mean there's no fulfilling work or enjoyable work.

It does. I mean, as I said last week, so many people have frustrating and boring jobs. Which they only do because they need the money. Other people can't find work. Other people are far too busy.

It's this imbalance once again. And it's the frustration, the boredom, the stress that often comes from work. And then, of course, above all is death.

The end of verse 19. You are dust. And to dust you shall return. Death as a punishment for sin.

As Paul says in Romans 5, these two grim actors tread onto the stage. Sin and death. Now, even here, there is a tiny glimmer of hope.

[24 : 59] You are dust. And to dust you shall return. What did the Lord make humanity out of? He made it out of dust. It's a faint hope at the moment.

It's a faint star shining in a dark sky. And it's just at this moment that God launches his counterattack. The descendant of the woman.

Your offspring. He shall. Verse 15 I refer to already. And indeed, you can read the rest of the Old Testament. As a longing for that figure.

At this moment, we don't know who he is. Or when he will come. I used to ask the Cornhill students. Where's the first mention in the Bible? Of the second coming.

It's here. 3.15. Because he came once. But he will come again. So, it's here right at the beginning. And many times it seemed that God's champion had come.

[25 : 57] Enoch. But then he was taken to heaven. Noah. He blew it. So did Abraham. So did Moses. So did David. So did the prophets. They all failed.

But they were all genuine pictures of the one who is to come. I think let's remember that. Never in the fallen world can a mere human being be the champion here.

They all failed. But when the moment arrived. God's champion entered the arena. Verse 24. He drove out the man. Place a flaming sword.

Sword of judgment and anger. And one day. The one son who did not fail.

Who did not sin. Was to take on him the flaming sword of God's judgment. And blaze the trail back into the presence of God. For all who will believe in him.

[26 : 55] That is the gospel. And that is why. Even in this fallen world. We can still grow into the image of Christ. Until the day when we see him.

And are like him. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. O loving wisdom of our God.

And all was sin and shame. A second Adam. To the fight. And to the rescue came. And how we praise you Lord. For that champion. The descendant of the woman.

One with you. Who became one of us. And is one of us still. The one who disarmed. The anger. Of the flaming sword. And blazed a way for us.

Into the presence of God. The great high priest. Who went into heaven. So that all his brothers and sisters. Could join him there. And we thank you for this.

[27 : 51] And we pray it may. Affect our lives. Even in this fallen world. We ask this in his name. Amen.