

## **TJW, HT, 9.12.07, 9.15am & 11am, Genesis 3.1-13**

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If there's been one news story that's got people gossiping this week, it's got to be the one about 'the canoe man', John Darwin. Last week he walked into a police station saying he'd lost his memory. He hadn't previously been seen since he went canoeing in the sea 5 years ago, and his canoe was later found smashed up.

And immediately most of us thought: "There's something funny about this". And indeed there may well be, because he's been arrested, and questioned about a life assurance fraud.

The thing to note is our common reaction: "There's some scam going here." We just take it for granted that people can be deceitful - it's often our first assumption when we hear of something odd. And let's admit it - we assume it because we know how deceitful we can be.

Now Genesis chapter 3 is one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible, because it reveals to us why it is that we can say that we love truth and justice, and even that we want God in our lives - while at the same time being people who can be untruthful and deceitful, and reject what God says to us in his word. In this chapter God shines a light on our murky spiritual disease - the disease whose cure he unfolds in the rest of the Bible.

It's a passage that is both simple and profound, so let's turn to it together - Genesis 3.

And we're going to see how the action here unfolds in four stages.

The first is when **(1.) The Tempter** appears. Verse 1 [READ].

Now if you're reading through Genesis, as we are these Sunday mornings, the appearance of this snake, to tempt Eve, is baffling.

In the first two chapters, God creates his world as a paradise for man and woman to live in. It's beautiful to look at, and it provides everything they need. God looks at all he's made, and calls it 'very good'.

So how can it be that one of the creatures that God has made is 'crafty', and tries to lure the woman into disobeying God??

Genesis just doesn't tell us. That alone shows us that the origin of evil is not a question we'll ever get to the bottom of. Evil is real, but in the end it's a mystery.

But yet Genesis does say some vital things about the origin of evil.

The snake was part of God's creation gone wrong.

Many religions describe evil as a power that sneaks into God's world from outside, catching God on the hop. That leaves you wondering whether good or evil will win out in the end.

But that gives evil too much power. Evil is not a power that can compete with God - it's a perversion within the world which God has made.

That means that evil is under God's power. And the rest of the Bible unfolds God's great plan in history to destroy evil at its roots.

Now when you get a talking snake in the Bible, it's right to ask: "what's going on here?!". My guess is that God means this to be a symbolic way of picturing the first human temptation, rather than a literal description - but it's hard to be certain.

The rest of the Bible unfolds the picture for us. There is a character whom the Bible calls Satan, who is called, more than once, 'a snake'. Revelation 12.9, at the very end of the Bible, says this [READ].

Satan was one of God's creatures, who wasn't happy just to be a creature. He wanted to be top dog - like God himself. So evil is rebellion by God's creatures. And, back in Genesis 2, Satan is tempting humanity to copy him by rebelling against God.

That's the tempter. And stage two in this unfolding drama is **(2.) the temptation.**

Temptation is always subtle. The snake doesn't come out and say: "Oh go on, disobey God - it's worth it!". Instead he comes in sneakily, as temptation always does. This first temptation sets the pattern for every time we're tempted to disobey our creator-God.

Satan starts by denying God's goodness: verse 1 [READ verse 1b].

He makes God sound like someone who won't give you anything good. But that is not what God has said - God gave them lots of trees to eat from - see 2.16 [READ verses 16-17].

Temptation will always tell you a lie about God. It will tell you that God is too strict, too controlling. But God is good. He gives us many blessings to enjoy. And he forbids the things he forbids because he knows they will harm us.

Satan's got a strategy here. The next step is to deny God's trustworthiness.

Eve rightly says: "God said that, if we eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, we'll die."

And Satan says, "Noooooooooooo...": verse 4 [READ].

Satan says: "Sure, God's made a threat, but he won't carry it out."

Temptation always lies to us: "You can disobey God, and it's OK - he won't do anything about it. He won't notice. He won't mind."

And Satan's strategy continues, in verse 5... [READ].

"Actually", he says, "you can't trust God, because he's only interested in protecting his own position, and keeping you under his thumb."

And temptation always lies to us: "God isn't interested in what's best for you. He just wants to grind you down with all his commandments."

And do see how in this evil strategy Satan is twisting God's words, and reeling Eve in, like a fisherman playing with a fish on a line. Look carefully at what she says in verse 3 [READ].

God had not said anything about not touching the fruit. He just told them not to eat it. He's drawn Eve into his game of making God sound mean and petty.

And temptation will often twist in your mind what God actually says, to make him seem more like an ogre than a friend.

I don't need to spell out the details of our temptations. I know that this pattern of temptation is played out in my heart all the time - and I guess you know the same about yourself.

By now Satan has planted the seeds, and Eve completes the temptation for herself - again, in ways that are repeated most days in our hearts.

Verse 6 [READ verse 6a]. She's led first by her human senses - the fruit looks good. The tragedy is that God had given them so much enticing food that they could freely eat. But when we let our desire focus in on what we know is forbidden, we start to get fixated by it.

And then she lets herself be led by human pride: she saw that it was desirable for 'gaining wisdom'.

Of course God wants us to be wise in the sense of knowing his Word, trusting his goodness. But the wisdom Eve reaches out for is what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents: it's the wisdom to be able to decide what's good for us and what's bad for us.

Only God has that wisdom. Eve's after his job, wanting to make up her own rules for living in God's world.

Every time we go along with temptation to disobey God, we are saying: "I don't want to live under God in his world - I want to live as if I made the rules." That is the foolish rebellion that temptation is leading us into.

Now I'm not going to apply this to us in the way that you might think I will.

I'm not going to urge you to fight temptation, and give you strategies for winning the battle when temptation strikes. Those are good things to have - but it's not where these verses really point.

You see, if Adam and Eve sinned even in the perfect Paradise of Eden, what hope have we got of fending off every temptation here in Hinckley - which is not Paradise, nice though it is - and is certainly a lot harder to live in than Eden?

Where this points us is not to our own strength, but to Jesus Christ.

Turn on to near the end of the Bible, Luke 4.1 [READ verses 1-4].

Here's Jesus not in cushy Eden, but in the wilderness, and hungry - living in the tough world that we live in. And he keeps responding to

the tempter this way: “I trust God - I trust his goodness - I trust his word.”

Our salvation is found in uniting ourselves with this perfect man - in having our sin clothed not by a fig-leaf - but fully covered up by Christ’s perfection, and righteousness.

He was victorious where Adam and Eve failed, and where all of us have failed. So our only hope, our sure hope, is to hold on to him.

The tempter... the temptation... and stage 3 is, tragically, **(3.) the sin:** back in Genesis 3, verse 6 [READ verse 6b].

The snake did all his work on Eve. And as you read this, you’re wondering: “Where’s Adam? Hiding in his garden shed?”. And it turns that that he was ‘with her’, as it says, probably all along, doing nothing.

He utterly failed in his responsibility to help his wife be faithful to the Lord.

And then, after she sinned through temptation, he sinned by going along with her: eating the fruit because she gave him some.

Man and woman were equally responsible in their rebellion against God.

This sin is told in a remarkable unspectacular way here, isn’t it: “and they ate”. But this was the awful turning-point, right at the beginning of human history.

And it describes the world we're born into. We repeat this pattern of sin for ourselves - and we inherit the consequences of the original sin committed by our first ancestors - just as any child inherits the consequences of the lives their parents have lived.

The tempter... the temptation... the sin, and then, for this morning, the final act in this tragic drama: **(4.) the consequences of sin.** God is going to judge them for their sin, and that's to come next week.

But just now let's see the vital consequences that come first.

They are alienated from each other - verse 7 [READ].

That's a tragic fall from how God made them to be - in the last verse of chapter 2 [READ 2.25].

God made us to have deep relationships with each other - whether that be in marriage, with its sexual side - or in friendship, which is not to be sexual, but still very close.

But it's our sin that makes us want to cover ourselves up before others.

And they're ashamed before God - verse 8 [READ verses 8-10].

God made them to live in harmony and closeness with him. But when they've denied his goodness and his trustworthiness, and disobeyed him, all they want to do is hide - because they can see how exposed they are before him.

Every Christian who feels the weight of their own sin has also wanted to hide from God, while realising that you can't escape him.

And their sin creates a culture of blame - verse 11 [READ verses 11-13].

Eve blames the snake. Adam blames Eve, but he's really blaming God: "you put this woman here, and she led me astray."

God had made them to be like him. But now they're behaving like Satan - denying that God has been good to them - denying that he'd given them all the blessings they needed.

But yet there is the most wonderful brilliant ray of hope, shining in all this mess.

Even in our sin, God searches for us - verse 8 - the Lord God is still walking in the garden. He hasn't given up on his world, despite its horrible rebellion against him.

And in verse 9 he's still calling out to them: "Where are you?"

Of course he's God, and he knows where they are. They can't hide from him.

But he's tenderly trying to entice them out from their hiding-place.

He hasn't given up on the people he made, even when start living more like the devil than like God.

You and I would probably give up on something we made that went so badly wrong. But not God. He is more gracious, more loving, more patient than we could ever dream he is.

Do you remember two things Jesus said?

There was a bad man called Lazarus - he was a swindler. (The police are still interviewing the canoe-man, John Darwin, so we

don't yet know about him - but Lazarus was a self-confessed crook). Jesus went straight up to him, and said: "Lazarus, I want to come to your house today." Lazarus welcomed him in, and Jesus turned his life around. And Jesus commented: "I came to seek and to save what was lost."

And another time, when the decent religious people were complaining that Jesus was spending too much time with 'low-life' and 'riff-raff' (as they saw it), Jesus told a story about a shepherd who went searching after a lost sheep, and brought it home rejoicing. And Jesus was saying that he was God, come searching after the lost.

We have inherited and repeated Adam and Eve's sin - every single one of us.

But God keeps searching after us, sending Jesus to find us and bring us home to him.

How can anyone keep hiding, when he searches and calls so lovingly, and so powerfully?

And what a joy to have been found and brought home by him.