

“When Sin Seems Good”

Genesis 3:1-24

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In the first two chapters of Genesis, all's well in God's world. Everything he makes is good, and humans are the glory of creation, showing what God's like, caring for all he's made, created to enjoy relationships with God, with each other, and with creation. Even the one thing they couldn't touch, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was a kind of gift, because it meant God saw Adam and Eve as moral agents, and it gave them the opportunity to trust God. Genesis 1:31 says “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” It was excellent in every way.

But all of a sudden, chapter three opens on a dark note: the serpent slithers onto the scene, and he is evil. He casts doubt on God's word: “Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?” (3:1).

See, the snake is a deceiver. He makes sin seem good. God had said in Genesis 2:17, “You may freely eat any fruit in the garden *except* fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die.”

But the serpent retorts, “You won't die! God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil” (3:4-5). That's why Jesus says the serpent is a liar and a murderer.

“He was a murderer from the beginning and has always hated the truth. There is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

First, who is this serpent?

The apostle John tells us in the last book of the Bible, “The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev. 12:9). The serpent in the garden is the devil, the slanderer or liar, and Satan, the evil one. Job calls him “Satan the Accuser” (Job 1:6), and the Pharisees call him “the prince of demons” (Matthew 12:24). Paul simply says, he is “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He's the one who shows up in Genesis 3—already evil, already a deceiver.

So the question is, where did Satan come from? Genesis doesn't tell us. The serpent simply appears. He's there, he's opposed to God's purposes, and he intends harm for creation. Something has happened, and good creation has been corrupted. The New Testament provides some clues about what happened. Jude 1:6 says,

“The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.”

Peter echoes that passage when he writes,

“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

Jude and Peter help us understand the background for Genesis 3. God created all things, including angels. He made them good, with free will just like the first humans. Some of them rebelled against God, not willing to serve him, but wanting to take the place of God. They wanted to be their own authority, and that pride was the starting point for all sin and wrongdoing. Satan is the chief rebel, the main villain, and he brought others with him in his fall. The book of Isaiah has a prophecy about the downfall of the Babylonian king that parallels Satan’s downfall,

“How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, ‘I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

It’s like Venus, the morning star that seems to fall to earth. Arrogance has brought him down. The devil isn’t a little man in a red suit with horns. He’s personal evil on the cosmic level. So the snake in the garden is Satan, evil that’s positioned against us.

Second, Wrongdoing Always Brings Consequences.

Our family has a friend whose boy is always getting into trouble. When the boy was two, his mom told him to keep the dog in the house. The boy went straight over and let the dog out the front door, and the dog ran away. The dad went to look for the dog in the neighborhood, and the mom said, “Ryan, you disobeyed me, and there will be consequences.” The little guy got this panicked expression, and he said, “No! Not *consequences!*”

But there are always consequences for evil. It can’t be any other way. And so, God curses the snake. He announces punishment, or consequences for the evil that the humans have done.

We see the consequences in God’s pronouncement. He made people for a relationship with himself, with each other, with the earth they were to care for. And now, each of these relationships is hurt: Adam and Eve accuse each other for the sin they had committed. Now man would dominate, or rule over his wife. Now, humans would have to struggle to earn their living from the earth, and there would be pain in childbirth. Now, even access to paradise would be cut off. From God, to the garden, to the good friend, it’s all been compromised.

We see the results of sin in the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament, where an animal had to be slaughtered to gain forgiveness from God. We see it in the statement of the writer of Hebrews, who wrote,

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22).

We see it in the animal skins God gives to Adam and Eve, to cover the shame of their nakedness—an animal needed to die because of their bad choice. Sin is costly.

Don't we know that from life's experience? There's pain and broken relationships all around us, and that's not what God intended from the beginning. But there are always consequences for wrongdoing. When we choose to sin, it hurts God, it hurts others, and it hurts ourselves.

Third, God Reaches Out to Save.

Look at what God does once Adam and Eve introduce wrongdoing into creation by disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit. He calls to Adam, and he asks a series of questions: “Where are you?” (3:8); “Who told you that you were naked?” (3:11); “Have you eaten the fruit I commanded you not to eat?” (3:11); and “What is this you have done?” (3:13b)

Each of these questions is an opportunity to come clean, to run to God for forgiveness. And notice this: God doesn't curse Adam and Eve. He curses the snake, and in that curse is the promise of a solution for evil. God says,

“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” (Genesis 3:16).

God is promising that one day, a Savior will come to deal with the problem of evil. This one will be the offspring, the descendant of the woman. He will do battle with the offspring of the serpent, the works of evil. “And he will bruise your head.” In other words, he will strike the serpent himself.

God was saying, the day's coming when the devil will be defeated. The day's coming when Jesus will suffer, absorbing evil in himself as the perfect sacrifice, and he will strike evil with a mortal blow.

The writers of the New Testament got it. They understood this was a promise of the Savior that would bring victory. Paul says in Romans,

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20).

That's a powerful promise. God's intention for us is peace, and to establish it, he will eradicate evil once for all. It's why the writer of Hebrews says,

“Jesus...became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying, could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The movie “The Passion of the Christ” shows this. Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He’s struggling spiritually, trying to find the courage to suffer and die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He prays, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine” (Mark 14:36). At that moment a snake appears at Jesus’ feet. It’s something demonic, sent by Satan. Jesus stomps his foot, crushing it.

That’s what Paul was getting at when he said,

“[Christ] forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross. In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ” (Colossians 2:13c-14).

That’s what happens for everyone who trusts Jesus. When he died for our sins, he paid the price for all the evil the world has ever known, from Adam and Eve’s first sin in the garden to all the wrong stuff of our own lives. When Jesus died on the cross, the devil was disarmed. The perfect descendent of the woman battles evil in order to save you.

Fourth, God is in charge.

Satan is called the “ruler of this world.” His power is real, and the damage he causes is real, but it’s limited. The devil is a power, but he’s not the ultimate power. God is.

You could see that in the ministry of Jesus. He did battle with demons and unclean spirits, but he had authority over them. That’s why the Bible tells us, “He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (Mark 1:27). When Jesus commands, the devil obeys.

That means the devil isn’t sovereign over your life, if you’re a follower of Christ. Yes, he’s dangerous. Peter says he’s a roaring lion, prowling around looking for some victim to devour. But he goes on to say you can withstand him. He says,

“Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith” (1 Peter 5:9).

You have Holy Spirit in you, and you can overcome evil, “because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

One of the great principles of the Bible is that God uses all things to accomplish his good purpose for his creation. It means he uses even evil for good. Even the bad things that God allows you to struggle with, he’s using these things for a greater purpose in our lives. He’s shaping us and making us more like Jesus and causing us to depend more on him. He never causes evil, but he always uses it for our ultimate good. He allows Satan to go only so far, and no further. The power of evil is real, but it’s limited, and it’s under God’s ultimate control. He’s in charge.

How do we come to terms with evil?

How are we supposed to deal with it when we see the evil of poverty and injustice, the evil of natural catastrophe, or the evil of terrorism? Here are some truths to remember from the text this morning.

1. Expect evil. “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12)
2. Hate evil. “Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9).
3. Endure evil. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). Jesus says, “And everyone will hate you because of your allegiance to me. But those who endure to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13).
4. Pray for rescue from evil. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). Sometimes we might wonder, “Why would God lead us into evil?” The answer is, he wouldn’t. A better translation is, “Do not let us be led into temptation.” The devil’s goal is to tempt us into failure, but God’s is to make us strong.
5. Overcome evil. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Evil is very real in our broken world, and in our lives, but it’s not the last word. The great message of the Bible is that God overcomes evil with good.

So, don’t despair that this evil world is out of God’s control. He’s working out his good plan in the world, even when life doesn’t make sense to us. Paul says,

“How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever” (Romans 11:33, 36).

The devil’s greatest weapon is to accuse us, and Jesus has disarmed that weapon. Now if you trust in him, nothing can ever separate you from the love of God—not your own wrongdoing, not your lack of understanding, not the future, not the past, no power on earth or no power from hell, nothing has any power over you any longer. So when the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour, or tells you “How could God love someone like you?” then you tell him to get back to hell where he belongs.