

“WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?” **(Genesis 3:1-6)**

This morning I want to talk to you about what’s wrong with the world, and this week a well-known nursery rhyme came to mind – Humpty Dumpty... “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall – Humpty Dumpty had a great fall – all the king’s horses and all the king’s men – couldn’t put Humpty back together again.” No one really knows where this rhyme came from, but many think it was originally a riddle for children to solve – what is Humpty Dumpty? The answer, most likely, is that he is an egg – something that, if rolled off a wall and hits the ground, could not be mended by any number of people.

There’s actually quite a bit of theology in this rhyme because there is something that once sat safely and happily, high on a wall, but took a great fall, and ever since we’ve tried to put back together again. That is the story of humanity, and the Bible not only tells us what went wrong, but how to put it back together. The Bible, they say, can be condensed into four words, describing the four main themes of the Bible: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. That’s the Bible in a nutshell. God created a perfect world, but mankind messed it all up when they fell into sin – but God, in His love, sent His Son Jesus to redeem fallen man, and one day will return to put all the pieces that fell back together again.

The first three chapters of Genesis are monumental to our understanding of the world, because they tell the story of creation and the fall – the first two chapters tell us about the creation of God’s perfect world, and chapter 3 tells us what went wrong. Deep inside we all know that there’s something deeply wrong with the world, and all that’s happened over this past year has only heightened our awareness how far from Eden we have fallen.

In Eden everything worked right – nothing needed fixing – there was no violence – no division – there was no need for policemen or lawyers or doctors or therapists – there was no need to put locks on your door – there were no floods or fires or hurricanes – there was no death or crying or mourning or pain. Where did this world go? Without chapter three of Genesis, we’d be left in the dark, and the rest of the Bible would make no sense. It may well be the most important chapter in the Bible – at least in explaining what’s wrong with the world – and it’s not until we understand that, we will never know how to put back together again.

I hoping to spend three weeks in Genesis 3, which can be divided up into three parts – verses 1-6 describe how sin entered the world; verses 7-19 describe the effects of sin on the world; and verses 20-24 the first sign of how everything can be put back together again. Today we want to focus in on the first six verses of chapter 3 and how sin entered the world. Beginning in verse one we read...

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

What's wrong with the world can be summed up in one word: SIN... and here we find out what sin is and how it entered the world. Verse one begins with "now," which shows that chapter three is a continuation of chapters 1-2, where everything in the universe is good, but now something very bad takes place. "Now the serpent..."

The serpent, we later find out in the Bible, is Satan. The book of Revelation identifies Satan as "that ancient serpent, the devil, who leads the world astray." We know from passages like Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that Satan once was the chief angel in heaven – closest to the throne of God – but he rebelled against God and aspired to sit on God's throne. He, along with a third of the angels, were cast out of heaven, and are at war with God.

We've seen that the garden of Eden is like a temple where God dwells. Satan, the serpent, now invades the sacred space of God and tries to destroy God's perfect world and assume God's place as ruler. I don't think Adam and Eve were in the garden very long before Satan approaches Eve, and he comes as a serpent. My first image of a serpent is a creepy, slimy, scaring-looking reptile, but the Hebrew word for serpent actually means "the shining one," a phrase associated with a divine being. The serpent was likely a beautiful, normal looking animal – and certainly no one to be afraid of – and he comes disguised as someone wise and good.

2 Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan disguises himself as an "angel of light." He's never going to come to you as the prince of darkness or with horns on his head, wearing a red cape, with a pitchfork in his hand. He never comes up to you and says, "How would you like to mess your life up?" He comes as a wolf dressed in sheep's clothing. He comes as someone you can trust, someone who has your best interests in mind and wants to help.

Verse one describes the serpent as "crafty." He's clever, he's shrewd, he's the master of deception. Like a good con-man, he studies people – he watches for areas of vulnerability, of weakness – anything he might exploit – and he develops a well-thought-out strategy.

If you've played sports, you know that one of the ways you prepare for a game is to know as much as you can about the other team you're going to play. Pro athletes spend hours each week watching film of their upcoming opponent to see how they run their plays – do they like to go right or left – what are their strengths and weaknesses – they look for any little thing they can exploit to their advantage. When a guy like Tom Brady goes into a game, he knows exactly what the defense is doing and always seems to throw the ball in the right place – all because of preparation. Here we get to study the tactics of Satan, and they're the same tactics he uses today.

I picture Eve walking along the river that ran through the Garden of Eden – it's a perfect day in paradise – it's 70 degrees with a cool breeze. The flowers are in full bloom and the sun is shining. Then a serpent appears – just one of the many animals in the garden. He's a beautiful creature and no one to be afraid of. She's not even taken back when he speaks. It's a smooth, captivating voice.

His strategy begins with a question: "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" Did God *really* say? Really? He plants a seed of doubt in her mind about God's command. He does the same thing today in causing us to question what God tells us in the Bible. The Bible – God's written word – is the means by which God reveals to you and me what His will is – and the Bible contains hundreds of commands and principles that reveal of God's order and design for the world.

All that God commands – even the ones we might question – are wrapped in complete love for you and me – each command is given for our best. Psalm 84:11b says, “No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” Everything God prescribes is for our good. When we read or hear His Word, we have one of two choices. We can say, “Got it – this is right and this is wrong. You’re God and I will trust what you say is for my very best.” Or, we can say, “Hmmm, now why would God say that? I’m not sure I agree with that. It seems kind of outdated. Maybe it was for people way back in Bible days, but not so much for our ‘enlightened’ day.”

The first option – to accept and obey God’s Word – is to have a high view of scripture – meaning that you don’t interpret the Bible through the lens of culture – that is ever changing – but you accept it as the timeless, authoritative Word of God. He’s the creator of the world and I am His creation. The second option – to question God’s commands – is to have a low view of scripture and to sit in judgment of it.

There’s a growing trend today among some Christians to “deconstruct” their faith. They’re usually those who grew up in church and believed what they were taught, but as culture dramatically shifts away from a biblical worldview, they begin to doubt what they’ve been taught. It usually starts with the Bible’s view on sexuality and God’s limitation on sexuality to be expressed between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage. “Hmmm... that’s kind of narrow and outdated... I think love is love, regardless of how someone chooses to express it.” And so they deconstruct God’s design for marriage and toss it out the window.

They’re taught that Jesus is the only way to heaven, and they say, “Hmmm... I know a lot of good people that aren’t Christians – who am I so say they’re wrong.” They’re taught growing up that there is a heaven and hell – they like the heaven part, but they toss aside the reality of hell and judgment. One by one, God’s commands are discarded until one’s faith is “deconstructed.” Here Satan is subtly trying to deconstruct Eve’s faith in God – to question His Word.

Along with doubt, Satan distorts God’s command... “Did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?” He makes God’s command seem overly restrictive, implying that God is holding something back from her, when in fact, God had only restricted them from eating of the *one* tree. I can imagine the garden being filled with hundreds, if not thousands of trees, and God says, “Have at it... enjoy them all... just do not eat of the one tree – trust me – it’s for your own good.”

Our human nature resists limitations. If someone says we can’t do something, we naturally want to do it. Parents who truly love their kids are going to set up limitations – not to squelch all their fun, but to extend their life, to protect them, and save them from heartache. That’s all God is doing, but Satan wants Eve to believe that God is withholding something from her – he’s provoking her to cross the line God has set up and get what He’s depriving her of.

In verses 2-3 we find out how well Eve has retained God’s Word... The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” Eve repeats God’s command fairly accurately, but is a little hazy on the details. She rightly refutes Satan by saying that God did not forbid the eating of all the tree, just the one. But she also adds the words “you must not *touch* it,” something God never said. He simply said, “You shall not *eat* of it.” You can begin to see a crack in Eve’s thinking, that maybe God is being too demanding and too restrictive... “Not only can we not eat of it, we can’t even touch it.”

In verses 4-5 Satan becomes more direct... “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Satan starts with questioning God’s command, and now he flat-out denies that there are any consequences for disobeying His command... “You will not certainly die,” he says. “Nothing bad is going to happen to you if you eat of it.”

John 8 says that Satan is a liar and the father of lies – lying is his native tongue – and one of his most effective lies is that you can disobey God, you can live the way you want to live, and get away with it. This lie is repeated today whenever someone says, “God is a God of love, not judgment.” God is certainly a God of love, but part of His love is judging sin and rebellion – just as a good parent, who loves their children, will give them commands to protect them and steer them in the right way – but will not hesitate to discipline them when they disobey.

When there is no fear of judgment, there is chaos, and we’re seeing this before our eyes in cities like Chicago and Portland and Seattle – where law and order has been abandoned. The result is no surprise – every major city has seen murders and other crimes skyrocket the past year. God has built into the fabric of creation the law of sowing and reaping. If you sow good, you reap the good. If you sow bad, sooner or later you reap bad results.

I was reading a review this week about a new book written on the sexual revolution of the past 60 years, written by Carl Trueman, and he says that adultery and promiscuity and homosexuality are not new sins – they’ve been around since the fall. What is new, he said, is that these sins have become normalized and accepted, and even applauded. When sin is normalized, there is no fear of judgment. Do what you want and there are no consequences. This is what Satan tells Eve... “Hey, nothing bad is going to happen to you if you eat – only good things will come your way.”

In verse 5 Satan ratchets things up and says, “Not only will you not die, you’ll be liberated”... “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” In other words, Satan says, “Instead of listening to what God says is good and evil, or what is best for you, you can decide for yourself.” The only one who truly knows what is good and evil is God – the giver of life – and He wants Eve to trust Him and obey Him. But He doesn’t force her to do so – He gives her the freedom to choose.

Eve already knew what good was – she was surrounded by good – and she had some sense of what was what was evil, but it was based entirely on what God had revealed to her and Adam. She did not know for herself – experientially – what was good for her and what was bad. She was innocent, like a little child does not know what happens when you put your hand on a hot stove. Eve simply trusted what God told her. Satan says, “You don’t need God to tell you how to live – you can be your own God and decide for yourself.”

One of Satan’s oldest tricks is to make sin look appealing and good, and that disobeying God will pay off. What he doesn’t tell you about is the pain and heartache it brings. He’s the master deceiver. He’s like a fisherman who puts a nice, tasty anchovie on his hook, and kinks it just right so it will spin and catch the fish’s attention. He’s deceiving the fish into thinking it’s getting a nice mid-day snack, but he ends up becoming dinner. Satan never comes up and says, “I’m here to destroy your marriage and family. I’m here to ruin your name and reputation. I’m here to make you an addict.” He hides the hook. “Take a bite and your eyes will be opened – you will be like God.”

Verse 6, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” This is the moment that Humpty Dumpty falls off the wall. This is where everything goes wrong. Satan has done his job – planting doubt in Eve’s mind as to God’s goodness, distorting His Word, and deceiving her – now he simply steps back and lets Eve’s natural desires carry her into his trap.

James may very well have been thinking of this when he wrote, When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:13-15).

We all know what it’s like to be enticed – to do something that goes against God’s best for us – and you can sense the power of temptation working within Eve. The first thing she does is look at the tree, and this time she looks at it differently. The fruit looks good – it looks pleasing. So does all the other fruit in the garden she was free to eat, but this fruit has a special appeal. By it, she believes, she can gain wisdom. Instead of trusting God’s wisdom, she can decide for herself what is best.

Seeing the fruit, she takes it. Ut-oh. It’s not a sin to be tempted – it’s not morally wrong to be going about your day and being enticed to sin – but as James, says, “After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.” Eve has now given birth to sin – she deliberately takes the fruit and then eats it. Her sin had nothing to do eating fruit – her sin was disobeying God and acting independently of Him.

This is the same thing Achan does in Joshua 7, where God told Israel not to keep any of the plunder of victory. But Achan saw a bar of gold and some silver, and he decided instead of trusting God, he took them and buried them under his tent to hide his sin. King David did the same thing when he saw Bathsheba bathing from atop his palace – which is not a sin – but he lingered in his look and gave into lust. He took and ate of the forbidden fruit. The stories of Eve and Achan and David all illustrate the deceptiveness of sin – each saw, each took, each ate forbidden fruit, and each paid dearly for their rebellion.

What makes temptation so deceiving is that it looks so good, and promises so much. Hebrews says there is pleasure in sin – if there wasn’t, we wouldn’t give into it – but the pleasure lasts only for a season. The fun and satisfaction – the thrill – is temporary, but the consequences are long-lasting. God knows that, and that’s why every command He gives is wrapped in love – it is given to protect us from harm and enhance our life.

Verse 6 ends by saying Eve ate the fruit, she turns to Adam and says, “Here honey, take a bite of this.” And he does. At first glance, it looks like Eve is the one who messed everything up – she’s to blame for all that’s wrong with the world. But when you come to the New Testament, Adam is the one held responsible for bringing sin into the world. He was given the command not to eat of the tree before Eve was created, and he was given the responsibility to pass God’s command on to Eve.

1 Timothy 2:14 says that Eve was deceived – she was tricked by the serpent, but Adam wasn’t deceived. He knew it was wrong but did it anyway. As the leader of the family, he should have grabbed Eve’s arm when she reached for the fruit and said, “No dear, it’s a trick. We must trust God who has given us all good things.” But he abdicates his authority and willingly goes along.

What's wrong with the world? The short answer is sin. What's wrong is that our great-great-great-great grandparents, Adam and Eve, decided to trust themselves rather than trust God. They believed the serpent who lured them into thinking that they could become their own gods and decide for themselves what was good and bad, and by eating the forbidden fruit, they declared independence from God.

The ripple effects of this one sin – this one act of rebellion – has influenced every area of life. Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” In other words, because Adam sinned, every one born after him is born with a sin nature – like Adam we all choose, to one degree or another, to decide for ourselves how we will live.

There's a story about G.K. Chesterton, the famous British author, who was asked by the London Times to respond to the question, “What's wrong with the world?” He wrote, “Dear Sirs: Regarding your article ‘What is wrong with the world?’ *I am*. Yours truly, G. K. Chesterton.” All of us, because we are sinners, in some way contributes to what's wrong with the world – and while we may not be able to change the world, we can allow God to change us through Christ.

Jesus – whom Paul calls the second or last Adam – lived the perfect life the first Adam did not – and by trusting Him for salvation we can be brought back to God. Romans 5:17 says, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”

There is no way to overcome the fall of Adam except through Christ, and there is no way to handle the damage caused by Adam's fall except through God's grace. As someone said, *“Jesus came to my wall and died for my fall – so that regardless of death and in spite of my sin, through grace He put me back together again.”*