

The First Sin

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Preacher: Gordon R

[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. Genesis 3 verses 1-7 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, but 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, but also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and he ate it.

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked. So they sold fig leaves together and made coverings for the trees.

[1:14] Great. Thank you for that. It was so helpful to hear the scriptures like that.

So, I wonder if you guys have heard of the US Airway Flight 1549 that basically failed to take off from LaGuardia Airport.

So, 15th January 2009, I think it's called the Miracle on the Hudson. And about 90 seconds after take off, at roughly 2,800 feet, it was struck by a flock of Canada geese.

Both engines lost all useful thrust, and Captain Sully Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles had to ditch the Airbus into the Hudson River. This was a massive, I was going to say, failure to launch. Like, quite a scary thing to be a part of if you're there. I believe, but I haven't researched this bit properly, that it was the only known successful landing on water of its type, which is a little bit terrifying for you.

[2:14] If you follow the instructions when you get in a plane each time, if we land on water, it's a big if. Okay. Sorry if you're afraid of flying, that was not totally helpful. But essentially, a plane full of people, well, this is a generated image, but you get the picture, a plane full of people heading on whatever kind of journey they had ahead of them.

Suddenly, everything is going wrong. Maybe they're planning to go on holiday, maybe they're looking forward to a lovely time away visiting relatives, maybe it's just a simple work trip. Whatever it is, failure to launch is entirely appropriate for it.

They were suddenly being rescued, and quite amazing flying, apparently, from Captain Sully there. Fortunately, this ended well for them, but is referred to as the miracle on the Hudson, because so many lives were saved unexpectedly.

I guess what I want to know is, like, is this likely to happen again? And the question, the thing is, it's really unlikely, because you're unlikely to have both of your engines taken out by Canada geese.

You probably know that your planes are designed to keep going with one engine, so even if this happened mid-air, normally a plane would carry on to some degree.

But I found this picture of a failure to launch fitted quite well with Genesis 3, because similarly to this flight, I imagine, Adam and Eve, Genesis 1, living kind of under the leadership, the loving leadership of the Lord, and he's creating everything.

[3:36] In fact, they're created at that point. And he's done this amazing job of creating the world, and then creating these guys. And then he kind of fills it, and we see that progressing in Genesis 2, all is going really well.

And then Genesis 3, in seven short verses, it all comes crumbling down. And in the same way that you might ask, and I'm sure they did when this Hudson event first happened, you want to look and say, what exactly was it?

What failed? What went wrong? What caused this thing that looked like it was going to be so good to very, very quickly, so very quickly, become so dreadfully bad?

So here we are in Genesis 3, and this beautiful, beautiful garden, who I've protected their modesty slightly, having generated an AI image, and thought, man, there's a lot of flesh on display here.

So slightly pre-fall, they've got some leaves on, just to save anyone blushing. Or me, maybe. But how did things go from so good to so bad?

[4:43] And we're going to have a look at it and say, well, what were the investigators? What factors led to this? What exactly did they do or were they thinking? And what took them from this wonderful place of being with God, close with Him, walking and talking in the garden, to being alienated from Him, from being to some degree alienated from one another, and alienated from who He had made them.

And so that's our key question. What went on there, and what can we learn from it? What is there for us when we see this? Because, I mean, I certainly, as I read this, thought, wow, there's so many echoes of what it is like for us when we fall into sin, or when we're struggling to trust God to be the loving leader that He is, and for Him to take us to where we want to go, and He wants to go.

And I don't think we're so different, or as different as I like to think, as these guys, because I think there's a lot about the human heart that we can see in this story. So I will read the scriptures just one more time for us, because I think it's really helpful to, seven verses as well, it's helpful for us to just hear them a couple of times.

So it says this in Genesis 3, Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord 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.

[6:17] You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman, for God knows that when you eat 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.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Let's have a look for a moment at the key ingredients in this disaster, in this failure to launch, and for these guys abandoning the belief that God's loving leadership was sufficient for them, or that it could be trusted.

We have one garden, we have two trees, and we have three creatures. And this one garden is full of abundance. It's an abundant place. You've heard in chapter one and two that the Lord has provided, and he's created and provided for them time and time again in his creative process. He says, and it was good, and it was good, and it was good, and it was good. He made it good so that they could live in the middle of that goodness. And then in 2.15, you see he appointed them over it.

[7:37] So this garden, they were to be the stewards of. There was plenty, there was enough, there was a role for them in it. And then we have these two trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And we'll come back to these in a few minutes. But what we've got is two, I think, great symbols. One, the tree of life is used elsewhere in scripture as a symbolic of all the goodness that God offers. Like, it's like, this is a life-filled place, and his dream for you and me and for them is full of life. And then we have this tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And, we don't know a great deal. It doesn't, it doesn't, we don't really know the restriction around it in totality, but we know that God says, not this one.

Don't eat of it. And then we have our three creatures, Adam and Eve and the snake. We have loads more creatures, but these are obviously the main ones for this bit of the story. I think it's important we spot, just before we look at the what went wrong, that Adam and Eve are significantly superior to the snake in this story.

[8:40] We, some people say the snake is the devil, other people say it's, we don't really know, but, but what we do know is it's a symbol of, of evil being present, and the choice that they have to make about whether they follow evil or follow good, and whether they rebel, or, or they trust.

In our house, this character is called the sneaky snake, in our Bible story, one of those cartoon Bibles. And I find it quite helpful to be a little bit dismissive of this kind of, of this snake. He slithers along, suddenly starts chatting, we have to kind of ignore that, be comfortable with that. And, but what we know is he slithers right between Adam and Eve, and God. Eve follows the snake's line.

Adam lets her make all the mistakes, and then joins her, some might say when all the hard work is done of pulling the fruit from the tree, and, and it all comes crumbling down. Alienation from God. They hide, and eventually he expels them from the garden, says you are not welcome here anymore. And they alienate themselves from one another. They realise they're naked.

[9:48] They feel shame for the first time. And, as I've already said, they're alienated from the God-given purpose they've been given. They named the snake. They were given authority over it.

He was one of the creatures in which they, they were designed to be ruling over. And in fact, in a sort of attempt to make him feel, feel they had more that they could achieve, he then becomes ruling over them.

I think this situation, one garden, two trees, three creatures can be summed up by this phrase, that they no longer believe that God's loving leadership can be trusted.

I think the first sin is one of trust. Does God provide what's good for me? Has what he's, is what he's given sufficient? Can I follow what he says?

And can I know what he says? And we're going to look at those. We're going to look at three things that I think really help us pick it apart a little bit. I wonder, but I reckon we too experience that sense of both alienation, like am I living in what God's called me to?

[11:01] Am I getting along with people around me? Am I relating well to God? But I also think we probably experience, in fact, I'm almost certain, we experience that sense sometimes of, is this all that he has for me?

And should I, you see it elsewhere in scripture, should I answer the prayers that I'm praying myself? Or should I just entrust it to him? And, well, let's look, let's look at what's going on with these guys and what happened.

One, I think, is the seed of doubt. This, did God really say? And, I think it's a really key thing for us to watch out for when we're trying to live the life after the Lord and growing in love and maturity in him.

It's this, did God really say? Really? Are you sure he said that? Do you know? Could he have not said this instead? Like, I kind of know if I have to, say, nip out of my classroom for a few minutes and I say, just stay in your seats, I'm pretty certain there's a kid turning to someone and I'll say, I think he just meant don't move too far.

You know, you kind of, you know, and my kids will do this, there's no screen time after dinner. But dad, if we are learning in our screen time, can we have screen time after dinner? And you're like, no, no, screen time is no screen time, except they usually get us on that one.

[12:14] Okay, you can do a bit of your homework. But we know that in ourselves, I imagine, we see it in people around us, this technique here of saying, are you sure? Did they really say that or did they say that?

If we're going to live under God as our loving, kind of trustable master and leader, is to notice that question in our own hearts and notice it when it comes to some other people, did God really say? And do you know, that's a really important positive question. We come to believe all kinds of stuff, even as people who follow Jesus diligently, we can kind of get off whack a little bit and be sort of misremember or misapply stuff that he said.

So a really important question in Bible study is what does he actually say? Like, what does he really say? And that's a really positive question, but it can also be the beginning of leading us astray.

Did God really say that he wanted you to give regularly? Did God really say you mustn't gossip or is just sharing information for prayer okay? Or did God really say this or that?

[13:17] Well, I guess a key thing is knowing what he said becomes really important at that point, right? The invitation here is when seeds of doubt come from himself, from other people, is what did he actually say?

And how, and Angelo shared this some weeks ago really helpfully, just that sense of how are you feeling yourself? What he actually says really, really regularly. And he invites us to make time to hear him in word and prayer again and again and again and I don't think we'll ever grow old of that

to come back to him and say, what do you say for me, Lord?

I was thinking about this this week. I have a theory and I think it's backed up by kind of cognitive science that our traumas and the things that we feel loss about or sadness about often they're kind of written in stone like in our hearts and our heads.

Like we tend to have a thing as humans that we remember stuff that goes wrong better and more vividly because you're slightly programmed to improve, right? And I think that's a gift from God that we go, oh, I don't want to make that mistake again. And so those, we know from quite a few studies those things that go wrong we tend to remember more because then we can act on them and improve.

And the trouble with that is the stuff that's going well can also fade into the background. So when the Lord says something really great to us, we need a way of remembering that. And I know some people journal diligently and keep a kind of journal of what they've sensed God saying or what they're wrestling with.

[14:46] I've started doing that more recently and already I forget what happened two weeks ago and I find myself being like, man, I really sensed the Lord say something on that recently. What was it? That's two weeks, let alone 45 years of life.

Community is so vital for this. Did God really say? As we share what we're reading, as we share what we're hearing in prayer, our friends and our community can help remind us, hang on, when you wrestled with us a couple of years ago, do you remember?

Do you remember what he said to you? I think the seed of doubt is a natural thing to some degree this side of the fool but also is, it can be the beginning of this tragic failure that goes on for these guys and can for us in drifting away from the Lord.

Our Bibles, our prayer life, our journaling, our underlining, our scribbling, our sharing are all ways of just remembering what did he really say.

In teaching, my second thing I spot from this is this. In teaching, we have this thing, behaviour management, we have this called the black dot and I'm going to show you, I think there's a picture of just the black dot. It's the least exciting preach visual I think I've ever seen but here it is because in the classroom when you have a kid being annoying and you don't believe how often that happens, what you get is you can end up with this thing of spotting the one issue in the room and I think it's Bill Rogers talks about this and he says, you know, what we can often do, maybe in our own household too to be honest, you can end up spotting something that's not going right and thinking, oh George, will you just behave back there?

[16:21] Come on, focus on the board or will you get on with your work? And he makes this point of in your classroom you have so many other students who are represented by the white of the rest of the page who are behaving themselves, who are listening, who are learning, who are trying really hard and the temptation is and again, I think it's a bit of wiring and a bit of sin is that a temptation is to spot the blemish and spot the problem and in behavioural management he moves you towards just praise them, praise all of these guys, the other 29 or 19, depending on how many you've got in your class, just tell them how well they're doing and what you find is this person doesn't want to be the blemish anymore, they start acting up to it.

I find that really helpful. I'm not promised we're getting back to the Bible in a second, it's not a teacher training lecture but I think there's some of that going on here as well. You notice the snake points out the restriction that's given.

There's one thing the Lord says do not eat and the snake is there saying look at that. It becomes pretty much the entire focus of this conversation is the thing that God has said don't do.

He's not there saying isn't it wonderful that he made this and this and that and that and that or it says in Genesis 1 and he also made the stars like this throwaway comment he's made this glorious creation around them he's put them in it he's given them so very much and their focus their focus is the one thing that he has said not to do and I guess we can be like that too when we feel that we haven't got something we'd like or something is out of reach it can be so tempting to focus on the one thing the thing that we long for the thing that we hope for that God hasn't answered a prayer on yet the thing that maybe it's a change of job or a romantic partner or many many other things but the Lord's answer maybe not yet maybe no but look at the wonderful things he has placed around you the invitation is to not pretend when something is off or we our heart yearns for something that is out of our reach or the Lord has not yet said yes to it's not to pretend it's not there and kind of try and make it go away but it's an invitation to bring it to him and to look again at who he is your loving

father and take it to him and talk to him about it

I long for the Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to have just turned to him and said see that tree that's out of reach do you think we could don't touch it like you know for them to start the conversation there instead they go to this blooming snake and they have the conversation in the wrong place and he encourages them down the wrong path look again at the abundance he's provided abundance in relationship with him abundance in provision around you the many many things he's made I reckon that black dot becomes so much smaller and we're reminded that he is trustable because of all the rest that he has done the third thing and the final thing I want us to spot is I want us to see the half truths that go on in this story because there's a lot here that just isn't blatant lie that goes on in this conversation with the serpent he offers them partial truths actually there's quite a lot there that I think they can agree with and that we can agree with the trouble is not totally agree with and there's he says your eyes will be opened okay yeah it happens whether it should have happened then we know not we know their eyes are opened and that isn't a good thing for those guys at that time he says to them you will be like

[20:13] God do you know he's made them in his image absolutely like it's true already the thing is he's saying you will be like God he's not saying you are they are they've been made in the image of God they've been made to bear his likeness one of the purposes of them being in existence is that they're like him and that they'd represent him but he detaches those truths from his love and from him and the snake gives them the implication that you will be like God there's more for you beyond what he has given you he hasn't really given you everything you will know good versus evil they certainly will but God clearly wanted there to be a boundary there for them at that time as I've said you were already made in his image they were invited to grow up and mature I believe into all that he had for them at his pace in his loving care for them the problem wasn't they wanted wisdom and maturity the problem was that they were grabbing hold of it at the time that they felt was right not him there's an invitation here for you and me to trust his fuller truth that however we feel restricted or desire for something more that he is able in that he has a view on what you should have and when you should have it and he wants your good the half truth says you'd be free if you did this yourself for you'll finally become all you could be if you just go your own way and don't follow what he wants maturity though is found in him and not beyond him

C.S. Lewis has this idea that I found really helpful when I was prepping for this and I think it's from Four Loves on need love this idea that some of our love is directly because we have a need and he talks about parents and a love for their child being the kind of love that is designed to not be needed anymore and I found this a little bit scandalous at the same time as really quite exciting when I thought oh my goodness I and that when we die morbid as that thought might be or might not be depending on quite excited for glory when you die the idea of doing a good job as a parent is that your kids have outgrown you enough that yes they should grieve yes they should mourn and it should be a sad sad thing but also we should have done a good enough job that they survive and they thrive without us and do you know

I thought I'd give you a break I've talked for a long time and just put my kids up for a sec these make me full of joy I hope you'll enjoy this cute picture of them look at how little they are one of them has almost no hair but they gave me permission to put this up they have a veto on any pictures that I use in preachers there they are you know these guys and you know they've already grown an incredible amount I look at this and I go what are you ever that small or ever that unable to tell us your opinion and but one day they will be really grown up and we were talking this morning about how we will be shrinking essentially they'll be growing we'll be getting smaller and that will be a sign of success I love though that God is not like that I love that there is a privilege and there is freedom and there is joy to be found in depending on him whether you're 5, 55 or 85 that while these guys will outgrow us physically and possibly in love as well hopefully they're much more loving than I am that isn't true of the Lord and the sad tragic sin here we see in Genesis 3 is this sense in which Adam and Eve think they can be more that God is somehow less or not providing for them as a loving father they're getting a small view of his love what a wonderful reality we get to live in for our entire life and then into eternity that God loves us and that he wants to lead us well and there is nothing we can be dealing with or even long after that he doesn't care about for us I'm so grateful for the cross I'm so grateful that we get to because of Jesus we get to be adopted as his children and never leave that status we get to be loved by the Lord who is slow to anger and rich in love who doesn't treat us as our sins deserve yet shapes us more and more into his likeness but from

Genesis 3 I see be aware children of God be aware we can live in all the fullness that he's provided but we do need to make sure we're hearing his voice that we're recognising his blessings we're seeing all the things he's done that are good and not just the one thing or the two things that we're wrestling with and be aware that we're designed to live in ongoing dependence and turn to him with whatever frustration or need or sin that you're wrestling with because he is your loving father and he's inviting us to live as if it's completely and totally true that his leadership is worthy of our trust in every single area and every desire and all of our lives let me pray for us and then we'll go back to worship in a moment father god i thank you so much that through jesus we can be known as the children of god and that is what we are i thank you that we won't outgrow that love that you won't outgrow your desire to lead us and to bless us that you are you're wonderful towards us and father when we think of this first sin or we wrestle with sin in our own lives god i do ask that you'd help our eyes be open to your will to what you have done and what you are doing and what you want not to these other kind of lesser truths that are there tempting us and distracting us help us wrestle with where you put us what you call us to but with you god not in isolation and we thank you thank you for over restored if in the garden we were aliens of you we now through christ get to be drawn near to you get to be children of yours with full access to you your ear and your your strong arms to act in our lives help us with that lord and thank you so much amen