

# What's Wrong With The World?

## *"The Beautiful Lie"*

### Genesis 3:4-6

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on February 7, 2016

#### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Genesis 3.
- This spring we are asking the question, *"What's wrong with the world?"* We must be able to accurately answer this question because every way we seek to fix our world (and our personal lives) is based on what we believe is wrong with it.
  - So if we misdiagnose what is wrong with us then we will also fail in determining what will cure us.
- The 20<sup>th</sup> century is a tremendous example of our failure to accurately define what is wrong with us and, therefore, our failure to find a solution. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> people rejected the Christian idea that what's wrong with the world is our sin before God. Rather, people believed that our problems all stem from bad social systems.
  - As a result they believed that if we could change things like education and government then we could rid the world of war, injustice, poverty, and racism. There was great excitement about the future as people went about fixing these social systems.
- The scholar and historian H.G. Wells wrote a book entitled, *A Short History of the World*. He wrote it in 1937, which is of course just before World War II. He stated the following: *"Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, and that our children will live in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever-widening circle of achievement? What man has yet done, the little triumphs of his present state...form but the prelude to the things that man has yet to do."*
  - Then WWII plunged the world into darkness and all this optimism was shown to be totally naïve. Wells was disillusioned and wrote one final book before he died calling it, *A Mind at the End of its Tether*: *"The cold blooded massacres of the defenseless, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished – has come near to breaking my spirit altogether... 'Homo Sapiens,' as he has been pleased to call himself is played out."*<sup>1</sup>
    - The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most educated in history and yet it turned out to be the bloodiest century in history. Their solutions were wrong because they did not think deeply enough about the problem of what is wrong with the world.
- This is why we are going back to see the Bible's answer to this question in Genesis 3. I have been trying to show us that the Bible's answer to the question can be understood with the metaphor of pollution.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 159.

- To understand the Bible's answer recall what happened at the Mount Polley mine in Northern B.C. just over a year ago. Do you remember? All the toxic chemicals were contained behind a dam but there was a breach in the dam. This breach sent five million cubic meters of toxic waste into the nearby lakes and rivers. It brought devastating affects.
- In like manner, the Bible traces all that is wrong with humanity to a breach that occurred in Genesis 3; a breach that spiritually polluted God's good creation.
  - We are looking at this because if we can find out what went wrong with Adam and Eve, then we can find out what is wrong with us. More importantly though, if we can figure out what is wrong with us then we are on the right track to finding out what can fix us.
- Genesis 3 says that what is wrong with you and with me is that we, like Adam and Eve, have believed what I am calling "the beautiful lie." This lie is so attractive, so beautiful, and so enchanting that we are spellbound by it. But it is a lie whose toxins have polluted our hearts and brought devastating effects.
  - I want us to look at this beautiful lie in three parts. First, let's talk about the beauty within the lie. Second, the toxin within the lie. Finally, the One who rescues us from the lie.

## THE BEAUTY IN THE LIE

- First then, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** the beauty within the lie.
  - The basic story here is that the serpent wants to get Adam and Eve to disobey God's command and eat the forbidden fruit. He entices them to do this by telling them a lie that is very attractive.
    - I will tell you the lie and then explain it. The lie is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** if you want to reach your full potential, you need to break away from God because his rules are holding you back. So you can see that, like a coin, this lie has two sides to it.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** On the one hand the lie attracts us because it says obedience to God (and his rules) will hold us back from reaching our full potential.
  - Look at verses 4-5. **READ 4-5** – *But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*
- The serpent is saying, *"Eve, God is holding you back. The only reason God forbids you and threatens you is because God knows something that he does not want you to know. He's keeping things from you. Eve, as someone who is concerned for you, I am warning you that obeying him will restrict you from reaching your full potential and happiness."*
  - This is so attractive because no one wants to be oppressed or held back. The serpent's goal then is not to destroy belief in God's existence but to destroy belief in God's character; to make us feel that God's rules are not in our best interest, that we will miss out if we obey, that holiness cannot lead to happiness.
    - So on the one hand the lie attracts us because it says obedience to God (and his rules) will hold us back from reaching our full potential.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Second, the lie attracts us because it says disobedience to God (and his rules) will liberate us to reach our full potential. So obedience will hold us back but disobedience will liberate us.
  - Look again at verse 5. **READ 5** - *For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*
- You will be like God. What a powerful idea. We as creatures can be like God himself. This is so enchanting that when Eve hears it she is spellbound.
  - This is the serpent's version of Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech. But the serpent's speech goes more like this: *"Eve, I have a dream that one day you will throw off the chains of this God who restricts you. I have a dream that you will become all that you were meant to be. I have a dream that one day people will be judged not by obedience to commands but by how passionately they pursued their own dreams. So let freedom ring from the Garden of Eden to the throne room of God. Let freedom ring from generation to generation. On the day that you embrace the freedom that is rightfully yours, we will all join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last. Thanks to my smart choice, I'm free at last."*
- Do you see how powerfully attractive the serpent's promise is? Once you believe that God's rules are not in your best interest and that God is holding you back, it then makes perfect sense to disobey so that you can find true freedom and happiness.
  - This is why Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** *"To be as God, and to achieve it by outwitting him, is an intoxicating programme."*<sup>2</sup>
    - And Eve is now drunk with the idea. Her mind is reeling in exhilaration over the possibilities of what it would be like to be as God. It is a thrilling and irresistible thought.

## THE BEAUTIFUL LIE TODAY

- You can see the beautiful lie everywhere in our culture today. You can see it in new age spirituality that dominates our culture.
  - Listen to Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle, or Oprah Winfrey. The key, they say, is to realize that you are god, to embrace this, and to decide for yourself who and what you will be without conforming to the rules of organized religion.
- You can see the beautiful lie in the general spirit of our age. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor wrote a book entitled "A Secular Age"
  - Taylor says we live in what he calls "the age of authenticity." A friend of mine summarizes what Taylor means by this age of authenticity: **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** *"the age of authenticity is the idea that life is all about realizing your humanity, finding and living out your own vision of life"*

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 73.

*instead of conforming to society, the previous generation, or religious and political authority.”<sup>3</sup>*

- You can see the appeal of this because we certainly do not want to be supporting anything that oppresses humanity.
- You can see the beautiful lie in how people view Christianity.
  - It is common for someone to say, *“I really am interested in Christianity but while I am young I just want to have some fun and enjoy myself. I will come back later.”* The assumed idea here is that God and his commands will hinder self-discovery and enjoyment.
- You can see the beautiful lie in every sin people commit and you and I commit.
  - It does not matter if you are an atheist or a mature Christian. It is all the same. The only reason why we break God’s commands is because we first believe that obedience will hold us back and that disobedience will bring us the happiness or fulfillment that we really want.
    - You see there is a soundtrack behind every sin. It is the soundtrack that played in Eden. It is the soundtrack of the human race. The music swells to a crescendo and Frank Sinatra sings, *“I did it my way.”*
- For if God and his rules really do hold us back then it makes sense to rebel and pursue our own desires and our own happiness. This is the beauty within the lie.
  - As you consider your own life, where do you see that you believe this lie?

## THE TOXINS WITHIN THE LIE

- Let’s turn now in the second place to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** the toxins within the lie. You see the Bible says that the serpent totally misrepresented God, his rule, and the consequences of disobedience.
  - In other words, the beauty we have seen is nothing more than the worm that hides the hook. It is the cheese that disguises the mousetrap.
    - The serpent’s enchanting dream is actually a terrible nightmare.
      - Oh yes, he has spoken some truth but it is truth laced with poisonous toxins.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** It is true their eyes would be opened but not in the way they thought.
  - As soon as they eat their eyes are opened but this does not lead to an uninhibited dance of joyful freedom. It leads to shame that hides and cowers in fear.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** It is true they would be like God in knowing good and evil but not in the way they thought. Look at 3:22. **READ 22 - Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.**
  - Yes they know but there are different ways of knowing good and evil. God knows evil but only from the outside like a surgeon knows cancer. Adam and Eve will come to know evil from the inside like a cancer patient.
- The horrible irony here is that, in one sense, Adam and Eve were already like God. No animal was made in the likeness of God but in Genesis 1 we read, *Then*

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<sup>3</sup> Trevin Wax in a series of talks he gave on living as kingdom citizens.

***God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.***

- What horrible irony! They who were already made in the image of God listened to a beast of the field tell them how to become like God. What horrible irony! The man and woman were supposed to rule over the animals but instead were mastered by a beast of the field.

## **WHAT’S SO BAD ABOUT EATING THE FRUIT?**

- Now if we are really going to understand the toxin within the lie we need to ask the obvious question:
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** *“Why does God make such a big deal about eating an apple?”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** First of all, it never says it’s an apple. This old tradition comes from people confusing the Latin word for “apple,” which is “Malum” with the Latin word for “evil” which is “Malus.”
  - (I am convinced it was actually a Brussels Sprout. You say, “that is a vegetable, not a fruit.” You’re right but originally the Brussels sprout was a delicious fruit. After the Fall God cursed it to become the worst of all vegetables.)
- **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** Second, we should not think of it as a magical fruit, the juices of which would enable the human brain to understand good and evil.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Third, whatever the fruit was, the real point is that this was a test. It is not about the fruit; it is about God’s command not to eat the fruit. The fruit is simply the tangible expression of the command.
  - So the test is this: will Adam and Eve trust God or won’t they? Based on Genesis 1-2 they have every reason to. When the serpent tempted Eve she should have said, ***“You are stupider than a sack of hammers! How could I possibly question the goodness of God? You idiot, look around you. The God that you are slandering has given me my life, a husband who loves me, a garden filled with food, and most of all his own presence when he walks and talks with us. I trust that he will teach us good and evil when he thinks we are ready and in the way he deems best.”***
    - So will Adam and Eve trust God? Or will they believe the beautiful lie and say, ***“Your rules are a joke. We don’t want you ruling over us. We will be our own gods and decide for ourselves what is good and evil?”*** It is not the tree or the fruit that is the issue. It is the command of God.
- Well, the tempter’s work is done. He never told Eve to eat but he made it easy to do so. He made her suspicious of God’s true motives, denied that God would punish her, made her think God was holding her back, and promised that disobedience would lead her to reach her true potential.
  - The story then moves into slow motion as we experience Eve’s every thought. **READ 6** – ***So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise...***

- The word “saw” means to give deep consideration to. She reconsiders God’s command in light of the serpent’s words. The fruit appeals to her senses. It is good to eat and beautiful to look at. Moreover, it can give her wisdom that she now believes God is withholding from her.
- The pace of the story then quickly accelerates. In rapid-fire statements the entire event takes place. She saw. She took. She ate. She gave to her husband. And he ate. And the world collapsed around them.
  - Apparently Adam was with her the entire time but stood passively by as his wife was deceived and his God defamed. Both Adam and Eve are guilty but Adam bears ultimate responsibility, for as we will see in a few weeks it is Adam whom God holds responsible as the head of the human race.
    - When the serpent accused God of lying, Adam should have picked up a rock and crushed the serpent’s head. But, along with his wife, Adam ate the fruit.

## WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?

- So let’s bring this entire series together now. **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** The Bible says the root of our problems, on a global level and on a personal level, is that we have turned away from our Creator. The Bible calls this “sin.”
  - Sin is not just breaking one of God’s rules. Every sin is nothing less than the creature swinging its puny fist in the face of its Creator and saying, ***“I will not follow you. I don’t trust you. I will live how I want. I will be my own god.”***
    - Every sin then is an act of mutiny as we attempt to de-god God. Every sin is an act of cosmic treason as we seek to usurp God. For this we incur tremendous guilt before God and were banished from his presence in the garden.
- That the serpent lied is obvious from our experience. For all the self-help books telling us we are gods we do not rule our lives or our world very well. For all our heroic efforts to throw off God’s rules and live authentically we are filled with anxiety, anger, sadness, and confusion. Oh yes, we can sing “I did it my way” but our way has not worked out very well.
  - Our world is filled with problems of poverty, materialism, abuse, and genocide. Our personal lives are unhappy, anxious, and unfulfilled. The Bible says that under all our problems is the fact that we have rejected God and tried to be our own gods. This is the toxin within the lie.
    - Again, I ask you, “Where in your life do you see that you believe the beautiful lie?”

## THE ONE WHO RESCUES US FROM THE LIE

- Having talked about the beauty within the lie and the toxin within the lie we come finally now to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** the One who rescues us from the lie.
  - In Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15 Paul compares Jesus to Adam. He calls him the last Adam. **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** As the last Adam, Jesus came to

undo what Adam did. As the true and better Adam, Jesus came to succeed where Adam failed.

- Although Adam's actions cast us out of God's presence, Jesus came to forgive us and bring us back to God.
- At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus goes on the offensive. In the garden the serpent came to Eve but at the beginning of his ministry Jesus went after the devil for it was the Spirit who led him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus stalked Satan and initiated a confrontation.
  - Jesus was picking up where Adam left off. But his temptation is not among the four rivers of the lush garden. It is in the desert.
  - His temptation is not among fruit trees but in a place where there is no food and he is hungry.
    - The serpent tries to get Jesus to doubt the goodness of God for if he is the Son of God why would God leave him hungry? He tries to get Jesus to take his life and destiny into his own hands rather than submitting to God.
- Where Adam failed to trust God, Jesus passed the test.
  - Where Adam threw off God's authority, Jesus submitted to it refusing to bow to Satan.
  - The first Adam let the serpent speak. The last Adam shut him up by speaking back.
  - The first Adam let the serpent misquote God's words. The last Adam quoted scripture and exposed the devil's lies.
    - Jesus was *"tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."*
- Since the devil could not deceive Jesus, he had him killed.<sup>4</sup> Satan and his demons must have been dancing with joy believing they had finally won. Hanging on the cross it certainly seemed as if Jesus had lost. But the cross was God's great move to utterly defeat Satan.
  - It is our sins that kept us in bondage to Satan. But at the cross God took our sins and put them on Jesus. Jesus was punished in our place. With our sins fully paid for Satan now has no more power over us.
    - Colossians 2 puts it perfectly. *"He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."*
- In the seconds before he died Jesus cried out, *"It is finished."* This was not a cry of one who has given up in despair: *"it is finished."* No, it was a shout of victory for all that needed to be done to reconcile us to God had been done: ***"IT IS FINISHED!"***
  - The message of Christianity then is this: you have sinned and are cut off from God but Jesus can forgive your sins and restore you back to God in this life and forevermore. How do you get this great gift?

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:3, "Then Satan entered Judas...And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."

- Bow your knee. Submit to your rightful ruler. He is the good God for he gave his Son for you. He can be trusted.

### THE GREAT REVERSAL OF “TAKE AND EAT”

- The serpent encouraged Eve to take the fruit and eat it. And we read that she “took of its fruit and ate.” She “gave” some to her husband and “he ate it.” How easy this action was. And yet how difficult was its undoing. The Son of God would have to taste humiliation and death.
  - But now those words, “take and eat” have become words of salvation. For in order that we might be continually strengthened in our faith that Jesus’ death brings us back to God, Jesus told us to regularly celebrate a simple meal.
    - He took bread and a cup filled with the fruit of the vine. He gave thanks to God, which showed his total trust in the goodness of God. As Eve *gave* the fruit to Adam to eat, Jesus then said, “This is my body *given* for you.”<sup>5</sup> We then read that he “gave” his disciples the bread and the cup. He said, “Take it” and they took it.<sup>6</sup>
- And so in this simple meal we declare our trust in Jesus – that it is through his death that our sins are forgiven, that we are reconciled to God, and that we long for the day when Jesus returns, everything is made right, and we eat and drink in the kingdom of God. Jesus came to undo what Adam did.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 22:19.

<sup>6</sup> These paragraphs inspired in part by Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 73.