

PARADISE LOST

Genesis 3:1-24

Genesis Chapter Three is one of those ancient stories that is as modern as ever. For it isn't just about the first man and woman; it's really about you and I. So let's look at this story to see what we can find out about ourselves; and about what God is doing about it all. We'll do this by looking at the story section by section.

So, grab your pew Bible, and open it to Genesis Chapter 3.

PARADISE: LIFE, WORK, & LOVE

We have to begin, though, at the very beginning.

In Chapter Two of Genesis we are given a picture of the world, and the people in it, as it was supposed to be.

The three main aspects of our existence are described here:

We are given life by the Creator who fashioned humankind out of clay. God carefully crafted every limb and every cell, and finally breathed life into that lump of dirt so that it became a living being. How lovingly God has fashioned humankind!

Having fashioned humankind, God now sets up a beautiful garden in which the human is to live and work. The Greek version of the Old Testament uses the word "paradiso" for this garden, from which we get the word "paradise".

And it was a paradise! It wasn't like the paddocks many of you might work in. It was more like the house garden with the vegy patch and flower beds and fruit trees. And there wasn't any rain at this stage, but there were springs that never ran dry; and these springs formed creeks that ran throughout the garden.

And finally he gives us love: the Lord "built" a woman from the man. Of all the creatures in the garden, only the woman was "just right" for the man, because only she was like the man but different in just the right way too.

So God gives us life and work and love. What more could we ever want or need?

PARADISE LOST

It is in this paradise that something goes wrong:

READ [Genesis 3:1-7]

The man and the woman are both tested and tempted, and it all hinges around "being like God".

God tests their faithfulness to him by commanding them not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge

meant more than knowing what was good or bad. It has the broader sense of knowing what is useful and beneficial for one's life, and what could cause harm and a degrading of the "quality of life" (to use some modern jargon).

And they are tempted by the "serpent" to be independent of God. "To be like God" really means not needing God anymore. Or, to put it another way, to be able to "do your own thing".

In essence, the man and the woman's disobedience has two base causes: pride and faithlessness. They had misplaced pride because they wanted to be like God. And they were faithless, for they did not trust God to care for them in all their physical needs.

The "serpent" -whatever that creature was we don't know, the word used doesn't really mean snake, but something far more mythical- The serpent purposefully works on these two matters pride and trust. First it worked at the woman's trust in God: "Did God really say . . .?" Which is the same as saying: "You've really got to guess the secret intentions of God." Which ultimately means you can't take God at his word -you can't trust him.

The serpent works on the woman's pride: "God doesn't want you to eat from the tree of knowledge because he doesn't want you to be like him."

I don't think human nature has changed since Adam and Eve. Don't we still try to second-guess God's motives over some matter - like a drought, or a storm, or an illness? And don't we like to twist God's Word into something that's more comfortable for us? Like some religious groups who are convinced that material wealth is proof of God's grace in one's life. Or that God's free and unlimited forgiveness means you can go and do as you please during the week, and come to church on a Sunday morning with confidence that God has forgiven you and doesn't mind in the least what you get up to outside of "church hours".

And isn't it true that one of the best ways to annoy someone is to make them feel someone has something good which they don't have? We seem to have that jealousy from the moment we're born. The "cutting down the tall poppies" is simply a negative expression of this: if you can't rise to equality with someone, then chop them down to your size!

So the woman takes this fruit in the hope of being like God, and being able to work out her life for herself.

WHAT ABOUT THE MAN?

But what about the man? What's he doing while the woman is

being tempted?

People have used this text of the woman falling into sin as proof that the woman must be weaker in moral fibre than the man. Sorry, blokes, but you can't use this text that way.

For the man is there. But far from yelling out a warning like: "Hey, wait a minute, serpent! Your talking lies. This isn't right!"; all we're told is: She also gave some to her man, who was with her, and he ate it. As simple as that!

The man has heard the discussion, and like the woman he wants to "be like God" too.

In fact, this little scene teaches us another matter about human nature: people usually always go along with the crowd. Haven't you ever noticed that what someone would do or not do on his or her own is vastly different what that person might do when with another person or in a group? We egg each other on, usually to something wrong! People haven't changed over the centuries.

KNOWLEDGE?

So the man and the woman fail God's simple test of faithfulness: they eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. They are like the child who is told by his mother: "Don't touch that pot, dear, it's very hot; and if you touch it, you'll burn your fingers." And what does the child do? . . . Or they are like people who see a "Don't touch. Wet paint!" sign; and what do they do? . . .

And, of course, they did gain knowledge of good and evil! And ever since, for all the good things that we have, evil is right along with them all. We can discover the secrets of the atom, only to use that knowledge to cause terrible destruction. We have wine and beer for enjoyment with the company of friends, only to abuse both and cause terrible illnesses and road accidents and troubles in families.

PARADISE LOST

READ [Genesis 3:8-13,16-19]

God gives the man and the woman two opportunities to own up to their sin, and so be restored to him. He calls out to them in the garden, but they hide from him. He asks each what has happened; but they each blame someone else.

And because of their hard-heartedness there will be all kinds of troubles.

The woman is affected in the area most central to her life: in her family, in relationships. There is pain in childbearing, yet she will still desire her husband, though he may be like a tyrant.

And the man is affected in the area most central to his sense of identity: his work. There will be thorns and thistles -in other words, endless troubles without a spectacular return for the effort put in.

Paradise has been lost!

YET GOD IS GRACIOUS

Yet even with so much evil now falling upon humankind, God is still kind.

Life goes on:

READ [Genesis 3:20]

God protects them from forever being lost in sin by barring them from eating of the fruit of the tree of life:

READ [Genesis 3:22-24.

But there will come a time when they can eat of that tree of life every day! For God gives them a promise that there will be someone to crush the “serpent” once and for all, though that will mean this descendent of the man and the woman being hurt himself:

READ [Genesis 3:14-15]

This descendant of the man and the woman was Jesus himself, who, though he died on the cross, yet destroyed Satan’s power forever. As we heard in the second reading today: though death came through Adam, life has come through Christ (Romans 5).

Finally, God made clothes for them from animal skins. Far better than the fig leaves they were using -a bit like wearing a few A4 sheets of paper stapled together!

READ [Genesis 3:21.]

This is a crucial scene: God had to kill something to clothe these disobedient creatures. Many, many years later God would have his own Son die that we may be clothed in his righteousness. We would no longer be naked in our sinfulness. Just as God covered the man and woman’s shame over their nakedness, so God will cover our shame over our sin.

And God has done so! For Christ has come. Though paradise has been lost, it has been regained for us in Jesus.

Amen.