

Breaking Bad

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, this evening I want to look for a little while back at Genesis chapter 3. We are doing a series in St. Columbus on the story of the Old Testament.

We've just started recently, obviously, because we're only in Genesis 3. And so it's part of that. So I hope it's not completely random just to have picked a chapter like this.

But I think it's a really helpful chapter, not just for our understanding of ourselves and God, but also having a cosmic understanding and an understanding of the universe in which we live in and the realities.

So we're going to look at that for a few minutes this evening. And I wonder if you've ever considered the relationship between being in control and trusting someone.

Because it's a really interesting interface between the two. We want to be in control a lot of the time. And the pursuit of knowledge is part of that desire.

[1 : 1 0] So the more we know, usually, the more we're in control. And that's completely natural to want to know and to learn many things. And that's good. But of course, it can become obsessive.

The pursuit of knowledge and the desire for control. Being in control of my life can be something that really governs our thinking. And we can struggle with things when we're not in control.

When there's lots of variables, when there's things that we don't have a handle on and that we don't understand. That can lead to frustration and to anxiety. And I think to fear.

And I think that's come across very often for people during this pandemic. Things that they normally were in control of, that they could plan and that they could hope for and look forward to, has been taken out of their control.

Even including maybe the reality of their health. And that can be very difficult. So there's an interesting reality too that control always in many ways battles with trust.

[2 : 2 0] And we see that spiritually. And if we're Christians in a relationship with God and having faith in God. Because when we are asked to trust in God, it often means that we have to relinquish a degree of control in our own lives.

Because we trust his love and his sovereignty over us. And often that is a challenge to our desire to be sinfully sovereign over our own lives.

You know, who's in charge? Is it my will or is it God's will? So who matters more, my life or God's life? And what is it that needs to change in my heart to enable me to trust God more?

And really the answer to that in many ways for us always is love, isn't it? Love changes everything. That great phrase, love changes everything. Because the moment we enter into relationships of love, we do relinquish control to a degree.

That's always the case. There's always trust involved. There's always compromise. There's always thinking about someone else and acquiescing to someone else's will.

[3 : 32] And as believers, we often need a great deal of wisdom to recognize what God asks us to do. And also what God asks us to trust him about in life, obviously, and in salvation as well.

There's an interesting verse in Deuteronomy chapter 29 from verse 29, which says, The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow the words of the law.

And there's that recognition that we've just got to trust God in a lot of things that we can't know and we can't understand. And that takes us right back to the origin, I think, of sin and the battles between us being in control and God's sovereignty.

And this chapter, chapter three, is obviously about that. And I've entitled this sermon, Breaking Bad, because really after the account of God's good creation in chapters one and two, we have here the genesis of where it all went wrong, the origin of where it all went wrong.

And it was sometimes called the fall, but it was the breaking of trust, wasn't it? It was the breaking of a relationship between God and humanity, between God and the representatives of humanity as well, Adam and Eve.

[5 : 02] And it's a fascinating chapter. It's a really difficult chapter. Anyways, I certainly don't have all the answers from this chapter. And this chapter doesn't give us all the answers. There's many things that are not revealed to us.

And I think part of the reason for that is because it teaches us about the introduction of sin to the world. Now, in 1 John 3, 4, it says everyone who breaks the law, in fact, everyone who sins, sorry, breaks the law.

In fact, sin is lawlessness. And it's interesting, that word there for lawlessness is the root of that word is what we get the word anomalous from.

And it's really saying that sin is an anomaly. It doesn't, it's not reasonable. It's acting beyond reason.

It's acting against reason. It's the distorting of trust and the distorting of love. And it's removing love and trust and behaviour from its author, which is God.

[6 : 12] And we see that again and again. That's something that we just can't make any sense of sin. The violence, the greed, the pride, selfishness, the hatred, it all seems so bizarre in so many ways.

Senseless. And there's no ultimate reason sometimes for why we choose to act in a sinful way. There's no reason, for example, given here as to why Adam sinned, you know, internally.

What was the trigger? He was perfect. He had no defect, no pressure, no threat. There was nothing to hook the temptation on within him.

He was innocent. He could have chosen to trust and not overstep the secure boundaries that God had placed for them. And of course, there's no answer that we have, that we are given as to the origin of evil altogether.

We know that Satan fell from heaven. We know that. We recognise that he rebelled. But why would a perfect angelic being do that? We have no ultimate answer to the origin of evil, nor indeed has any.

[7 : 27] However, sin has that senselessness about it. And we recognise that. But Genesis 1 of 3 are really important chapters of the Bible.

They remind us that humanity was created good. And that's very important that we were, as God created us, very, very good.

And sin and selfishness and evil and death is not how we were created. And it's not a natural part of creation, as it were.

And it also reminds us there's both the genesis or the beginnings of hope, as our condition is explained in these chapters.

There's a reminder that we are unable to change our hearts. We're not in control of this. We're not able to make ourselves right with God. We can't do that. And we'll see that as we look at this passage.

[8 : 29] We can't do things and put things right. But there is hope that is revealed here. So what I want to do for a few minutes is look at the character of sin and the results of sin as it hopefully explains a little bit about our hearts and also our world and also where it points us to.

So it's interesting, again, in this section we read, and we only looked at the first section, is that the word of sin isn't mentioned either. But clearly the characteristics of sin are revealed and we find out the kind of things that have broken our relationship with God as a humanity.

What we can recognize here, I think, is maybe something we don't think about too much, is that evil was already present in the universe in the story of this account of Adam and Eve.

At least it was known as a concept to Adam and Eve. God had spoken about the knowledge, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So they knew about the existence of evil and they were aware of death because that was the judgment.

That was the reality of what would happen if they ate from that tree. So they knew about death and they knew about evil. And they also presumably recognized that God was protecting them from this.

[9 : 59] He didn't want them to know certain things. He didn't want them to experience evil and obviously death in their lives. They may have known that there were angelic enemies of God and Satan.

We're not sure about that. It's not stated, but we recognize that Satan enters into this account in the form of a serpent, a snake.

And from Revelation, we recognize that's a designation of Satan that was well-known. Biblically, I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the abyss, holding in his hand a great chain.

He sees the dragon, that ancient snake, who is the devil or Satan, bound him for a thousand years. So there's this reality of evil and darkness that has entered into the garden at this point.

And what do we see particularly about the character of sin that is exposed here in Satan's dealing with Eve and Adam?

[11 : 01] I think the fundamental thing is that he introduces deception into the world. In verse 13, the woman said, the serpent deceived me and so I ate.

So just three quick things that I want to mention about that is highlighted about what that deception looked like in the interaction between Eve and the serpent.

I think the first thing is, excuse me, disorder. Verse one says, 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 see?

Now, whatever else is happening there, it's something a bit weird, something a bit strange, isn't it? We know that Eve was aware of the reality of evil and the reality of darkness and something forbidden and even death.

And whatever's going on here, there's something unnatural. There's something dangerous in a sense. There's something that Eve would have been better not to be inquisitive about, but maybe should have set alarm bells ringing in her mind.

[12 : 13] You know, God had given them, Adam, as representative of humanity, dominion over the animals. And there was a structure there and there was authority.

Here we have, it almost seems to be a usurping of that authority. It seems to be a bit strange that we have a serpent here who seems to be questioning that order and questioning that reality.

The animals weren't suitable companions for Adam and they weren't made in God's image and there was something completely different about them.

Here's an animal with guile and with authority who knows about God and it seems just a bit weird. It seems a bit strange. Could it be that Eve should have at that moment said that I'm not going to open a conversation here?

There's something that I should run away from. So there's disorder and that's part of the deception, I think. But also there's the original fake news here.

[13 : 20] In verses one to three, you have that interaction between the serpent and the woman, very famous for us in our thinking, where he asks questions and he portrays a different truth in inverted commas about God.

It really is the origin of fake news, of questioning reality. And it's very much a character assassination on God.

He seeks to characterize God as harsh, as being defensive, as being oppressive and controlling.

He was, in a sense, getting Eve to doubt God's love and his word and his justice. Maybe appealed to her own ambition. You know, God's made you in his image.

Why don't you decide what's good? Why don't you decide what's desirable and what can make you wise? You know, it's only another tree. It can't possibly be that bad.

[14 : 21] You've got all these trees around you. Why can't you just eat from this tree as well? It's not that serious. It's just about freedom and wisdom and God not wanting you to become an equal with him.

And you can see that he's really, although humanity is the focus of his deception, it's God that he is seeking to assassinate or God's character he's seeking to assassinate.

Humanity has always been collateral damage to Satan because we're image bearers of God. But it's God he truly hates and God he truly seeks to destroy and destroy the relationship God had with his people.

And it's strange because what he was offering Satan, what he was offering was what God generously was willing to give Eve in the right way.

So there was original fake news. There was disorder. And I think there was also subtlety in his deception. And it was amazingly subtle.

[15 : 25] He was planting seeds of doubt. He didn't eat the fruit himself. He didn't make her eat the fruit.

He asked questions. He deflected attention. He used her inquisitiveness. His timing was sensitive. God wasn't walking with him in the garden. It doesn't seem to be that he revealed himself to Adam at all.

He worked through Eve and behind the scenes. And that's interesting, isn't it? Because when Eve spoke to Adam, you presume that Adam's guard was down.

He was speaking to his lover, his wife. There would be no reason for him to have alarm bells ringing at one level.

And so the temptation from Satan was mediated. It was mediated temptation to Adam through Eve.

[16 : 22] So there was great subtlety there. And I think, you know, whatever we think of this account, we recognize these elements of spiritual deception in society and in our hearts today and in our sin today that keeps us off from God.

We recognize in the world we live now. And this is its beginnings. We recognize chaos and disorder. The deception of that that Satan has brought in.

It reigns in so many ways. And the more that humanity and individuals try and control the world and control their lives, the more chaos there seems to be.

It seems like we're grasping the wind. And even when we manage to get lots of control, either technologically or medically or whatever other way, we are still faced with that 100% reality of our own death, which seems to just laugh in the face of our desire for control.

It seems like we're trying to sweep up leaves in a hurricane. It's not how it should be, is it? And we can be deceived by that and deceived by our ability to be in charge, to be in control in the midst of all this chaos.

[17 : 38] But I think there's also that whole fake news thing, the denying of truth. We see it very clearly in the society in which we live today, where the lie is believed about God.

And we make up our own truth. And truth is just what we will make it. I use this phrase a lot, paraphrasing GK Chesterton.

When people stop believing in God, it's not that they believe in nothing, it's that they believe in anything. And I think we're seeing that today, that people, it's not that they are necessarily nihilistic, but they are believing in anything except God.

And everything that is fake is portrayed as truth. What is true? It's very difficult to know now. And technology has hastened that.

Whether it's about our humanity or about what we hear about others or about gender or about life or about love or about sin itself. You know, sin isn't so bad. Death is natural. We can fix it ourselves.

[18 : 43] Because all of these things are denying, particularly God's truth and unchanging truth of the universe and even of biology and of physics and of the world that we see around us.

It becomes very internalized. And it's subtle, isn't it? That deception is subtle. Satan often appears as an angel of light. He knows scripture.

He's super intelligent. He's happy to remain in the shadows. He's happy if we mock his own existence. And he is free to mock his own existence if it keeps us from believing in God.

But he remains the one who has that implacable hatred towards God and seeks to bring humanity down with him in the judgment that he himself is under.

And he'll do anything. And he'll turn you away from God and from his love and from his grace and from his truth and from his sovereignty. He'll twist everything. And one of his strongest arguments or strongest deceptions is that God is mean and God is not loving.

[19 : 54] And God is keeping us from good things. Why doesn't God give us these things? And yet the reality is God generously is willing to give us everything that we try and grasp sinfully and miss ourselves.

And we'll see that a little bit in the end. So we've got the character of sin. Can we also look just for a moment at the consequences of sin? Now, I don't need to apply this.

You can apply this as I'm going through it here. There's, again, three quick things here about the consequences of sin. And they're very powerful when we think of our own lives and our own needs and our own guilt sometimes.

The first is fear and shame as the consequence of the breaking of that relationship, the breaking of that covenant with God and the failure to trust him.

It's fear and shame. In verse 10, a very famous verse, and God says, where are you? He's answered, I heard you were in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked. So I hid.

[20 : 58] And if you look back at chapter two, the last verse, which is pertinent here, that the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. So the moment that there is a breaking of trust, the moment that sin enters their relationship and they rebel against God and his commands, there is fear and shame.

So it's interesting. The results of sin are highlighted in a relational way, very powerfully. And it's as simple as it's spoken of.

There's the nakedness that they experience. I think that's both symbolic and real. In other words, I think it does affect their physicality and indeed their sexuality.

But it's deeper than that because it also is symbolic of a vulnerability and an exposure before God, which Adam clearly experiences.

There's hiding, hiding from one another and hiding from God. So that that perfect trust, that perfect honesty is gone, has been taken from them. There's a vulnerability, there's an exposure.

[22 : 09] There's an immediate sense that maybe is difficult to interpret, a sense of needing to hide from one another and from each other. And there's a kind of sense.

It's the birth of selfishness and all its consequences. So they relate to one another differently and they relate to each other and to their bodies differently from one another.

And there's also that immediate in Adam hiding from God and a fear which wasn't there before, where he is relating to God as a judge in a way that he'd never experienced before.

And everything is turned upside down. There's fear and there's shame, guilt before God. And within that, there's that pathetic attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves, both literally and metaphorically a poor and miserable attempt to deal with something that was much, much deeper in breaking trust with God.

So there's fear and shame. There's also blame. Verses 12 and 13. And the man said, the woman you put here, she gave me some of the fruit and I ate it.

[23 : 25] And the woman said, well, the serpent deceived me and I ate it. And fair play to the woman. She at least recognizes and acknowledges Eve, acknowledges her that she was deceived.

But isn't it interesting that there's immediate blame? Adam has the audacity to blame God for giving him Eve as his partner and that she was the one who made him eat poor and weak and miserable.

And that immediately is a result of sin. There's a blaming of the other. There's a sense in which you're trying to defend what you're doing is right. The basis of justice is moved from God and it's moved into your own heart.

And you're always trying. We're always trying to justify ourselves. No matter who gets hurt, we try and justify ourselves. Whether it's whether we blame the next person. We blame our wife or our husband.

We blame our family. We blame spiritually. We might blame the devil for everything. Or we might blame God even. Anyone but me. And that's one of the consequences of sin. So there's fear and shame.

[24 : 31] There's blame. And there's also brokenness. So there's just that whole sense of brokenness. The covenant. The trust. The perfection. Is shattered.

Completely shattered. And God, of course, goes on to add his judgment to that. Which we haven't even looked at in the second half of the passage. He adds his own curse, his judgment into humans.

And so that the universe of the cosmos, the relationships between the land and between the animals and between humanity and between God is all broken. It's the death of life.

The introduction of death. And that is because Adam is not just an individual, but is also the representative of humanity. We're reminded of that in Romans 5, 17.

For if by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

[25 : 27] And that links us forward to Jesus, which I'll finish with in a moment. But we see that. That we see that it is the introduction of brokenness into the universe and into humanity.

Desperate. Desperate. So where do we go from here? Where do we finish? We don't really finish, but where do we move forward? Well, the rest of the Old Testament is beginning to point forward to the solution.

And that is revealed even in this chapter. We recognize so many things in this, so many characteristics, so many consequences of sin.

And say, well, what is the way forward for us? What is the hope for us in our lives and the frustrations and guilt and the vulnerability, the lack of control that we have? And of course, the key for us as believers to remind ourselves of, which is why it's so important and we're struggling with it and we're missing it just now, is the Lord's Supper because it reminds us of the cross.

And that's always at the center of our faith. But the one word I would like to use here to remind ourselves of that is mercy. It's the mercy of God that we see. And even in this chapter, as it points forward, the loving kindness, the mercy, the grace of God.

[26 : 49] We see it in two ways. See it, first of all, in the covering they give them. We didn't read this, but in verse 21, we're told that then the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and Eve and clothed them.

And God, in a sense, that's great. Because what God is saying there is he said, Adam and Eve, just own your guilt. Own it. Admit you need covered.

Admit there's a nakedness that has exposed your shame and your guilt. But own that and own that by accepting my covering for you because I know about it.

You can't hide from me. And don't try and cover it with your own feeble fig leaves. But let me cover your guilt. Let me provide coverings for you.

I will cover you. I will provide for you. I will protect you. And it will point forward. Now, some people say that the fact that it was animal skins was suggestive of the fact that it was the first sacrifice for sin, shedding of blood.

[27 : 50] That may be the case. But it's certainly pointing forward, isn't it? There's one step it points forward to it in the Old Testament to the priestly tunics that are spoken about in Exodus 28, which is make linen undergarments.

It's the same word, the tunic, the covering. Same word for Aaron and his sons. And they have to wear them whenever they enter the tent of meeting so that they will not incur guilt and die.

So there was a covering that was given to them that had spiritual significance and was covering their sin in a symbolic way. But, of course, it points forward, doesn't it, to something better that we all know about from even from the promise in this chapter that, again, we didn't read.

But in verse 15, in the judgment on the serpent, it says, and I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head. You will strike his heel. So there's that great promise of a seed of the woman, which the Old Testament goes on to prepare and protect the genealogy through to Jesus Christ, which would be Jesus Christ himself.

[29 : 10] He would be the one who would crush, Satan said, would destroy, ultimately, evil, darkness, sin, and death. And that's what is the great hope for us.

And we see it particularly, don't we, not just in the life, and the life of Jesus is hugely significant, the perfect life that he lived, but also especially in his death.

Because what do we see in his death? We see Jesus raised up on a stick, on a tree, like the serpent that's spoken of in the story of the Exodus with Moses.

Everyone who looked to that serpent in the desert was healed. But we know from Hebrews that that's taken and everyone that looks to Christ will be healed. Now, that's significant in two ways.

One is when Jesus was raised on the cross, he was raised naked. He was naked. He was exposed there. There was a shame and a humility and a vulnerability.

[30 : 13] And he was being exposed in his perfection because he was bearing our sin and our death, the kind of image and the symbolism of the serpent.

He was bearing that in our place. So that crucified Savior willingly came. And right from the very beginning, it was God's purpose and plan on into eternity.

That this would be the way he would redeem his people. And his death, his resurrection and his ascension are the greatest reality because we are reminded then, if Adam was given coverings of animal skins, then we have got the covering of the righteousness we spoke of or that we sung about at the very beginning in Psalm 51.

But Isaiah 61 speaks beautifully. And that is just a gentle hint that we are given here.

And in the story of beginnings and that give us answers to who we are and why we are, what we're like and why there's death and what hope is there.

[31 : 41] Do we need to be in control of everything or can we relinquish control to the living God and live our lives in obedience to him? What great relevance for today, isn't it?

That we can trust him and his sovereignty and his love, his commitment and his grace in our lives. And we can know when to question. We can know when to learn.

We can know what to learn. And we can seek his wisdom to know what is important to understand and what we can leave as unrevealed, as secret and trust him.

Trust him because he's good, even in our own circumstances. You know, we don't understand the pandemic. We might not understand why we've lost our jobs, why we're struggling as a nurse or a doctor, as a teacher, as a professional or as anyone in the world, as a parent, children or illness.

There may be all kinds of things that we don't understand, that we have no answers for, that we can't control, that are not in the variables of our control, but we can trust in the living God.

[32 : 46] He has a purpose and a plan. He's sovereign. He's good. He has shown us that there's no greater love that anyone could ever have with us than that he would die in our place, as he did, as God, with all the immensity of that.

And I hope that that encourages us today just to live in his shadow and to remind ourselves of the significance and the relevance of the gospel, of his truth, of the cross, and of all that it means for our day-to-day living as Christians.

And if you're not a Christian, be great. If you're not a Christian watching tonight, watching church service on a Sunday night, taking the time and effort to do that, that's brilliant.

And please consider these words and the truth of Christ and think about deception and the lies that often turn you away from making a decision to follow him. Let's pray briefly.

Father God, help us to know. Help us to understand. Help us to be wise. Help us to trust you and to put our trust in you for life and eternity as the one who's paid the awful, grim price of death and the wrath of God for our sins.

[33 : 59] And that's all great.

May we do so increasingly and renew our trust and believe in your goodness and be aware of the deception and the lies that keep us from knowing peace and shalom in Christ.

Amen.