

What's Wrong With The World?

"East of Eden"

Genesis 2:8-17; 3:22-24

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 27, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** In the film *Grand Canyon* a driver gets lost and his luxury car breaks down in a bad neighbourhood of the city. Gang members start to surround him but thankfully a tow truck driver shows up. As the tow truck driver hooks up the car he lectures the gang leader. This is what he says:
 - *"Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without askin' you if I can. And that dude is supposed to wait with his car without you rippin' him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here."*
- We can all resonate with the tow truck driver. 31 people were killed and approximately 300 were wounded in the bombing in Brussels this week. *"The world ain't way supposed to work like this."*
 - This past Thursday marked the 25th anniversary of the disappearance of 4-year-old Michael Dunahee from Blanshard Elementary School right here in Victoria. *"Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here."*
 - Our personal lives are filled with broken relationships, family problems, anger, sorrow, and health problems. *"This ain't the way it's supposed to be."*
- The question we are asking is this: *"what's wrong with the world?"* We must be able to answer this question because you can't fix something unless you can first define what is wrong with it.
 - You can't fix your car unless you can accurately define what's wrong with it and we can't fix our world or our personal lives until we can accurately define what's wrong with them.
- This morning I want us to go consider the Bible's answer to this question in Genesis chapter 3. But we are not just going to discover the Bible's answer for what's wrong with the world. We are also going to see what God is doing about it.
 - We are going to see how, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is working to restore all that was lost, to fix all that was broken, to renew all that was destroyed, and to bring us back to the paradise that we lost.
 - So rather than look at a passage that describes the resurrection of Jesus, I want to show how the resurrection of Jesus fits within the big story of the Bible. So let me break this message down into four parts. Part 1: Paradise Lost. Part 2: Paradise Sought. Part 3: Paradise Given. Paradise Enjoyed

PARADISE ENJOYED

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** Let's begin then with part 1: paradise enjoyed.

- The Bible's story begins by stating that this messed up world is not the way it's supposed to be. God did not create a world where suffering, murder, and relational breakdowns occur.
 - Genesis 1 and 2 take great pains to describe God's original creation as a paradise of perfection.
- Now listen carefully to the details of this original paradise.
 - You may think you already know them and may think some are not very significant. But you may be surprised later on. These details are like those seemingly insignificant events that happen at the beginning of a movie, like a red car driving by in the background.
 - Later in the movie you discover that the red car was the key to everything. So it is with the details of God's original paradise.
- God creates Adam and Eve and gives them a home in a garden within the region called "Eden." God fills the garden with trees to eat from. In chapter 2:10 a mighty river flows from the garden creating a lush environment. It also says that where that river goes the lands rich in gold and precious stones.
 - In the garden there are also two specific trees. The first is "the tree of life", which, when eaten from, would grant perpetual life. The second tree is called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from this tree. Aside from this one prohibition, everything in paradise is given for Adam and Eve's enjoyment. 5 red cars just went by you.
 - But all of these comforts are only meant to point to the greatest thing about paradise. The greatest thing is that God dwelt there with Adam and Eve. God walked and talked with them in the garden. 10 red cars just drove by.
- Let me go deeper into this idea that God dwelled among his people. The rest of the Bible makes clear that the Garden of Eden was the original temple. A temple is, of course, the dwelling place of a god.
 - The Bible shows that the garden was the original temple because God dwelled there among his people.
- You can see this by the way God commanded Israel to make its temple. When Israel came out of Egypt, God took them as his people and said he would dwell in their midst. He commanded them to build a kind of portable temple called "the tabernacle". Here is a picture of it **(SHOW SLIDE 3)**. The floor plan looked like this. **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** You can see there is a room in the back of the temple called the Holy of Holies. This is where God's presence dwelled. The tabernacle would later become the permanent structure called "the temple".
 - What is fascinating is that God commands that the symbols of Eden to be placed all throughout the temple. **(SHOW SLIDE 5)**. The lampstand was shaped as a tree, pointing to the tree of life. **(SHOW SLIDE 6)**. On the walls were carvings of flowers and palm trees (1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35) Pomegranates were placed into the pillars (1 Kings 7:18-20). Gold was everywhere. Precious stones were in the high priest's outfit.
 - All of this is meant to recall Eden. I will prove this in greater detail in a few minutes but right now I just want you to see this one

thing: *The garden was a paradise because God dwelled there among his people.* The reason there was no pain or death was because humanity lived in relationship with their Creator. This is the way things are supposed to be. But clearly this is not the way things are anymore.

PARADISE LOST

- We move then from part 1: paradise enjoyed to **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** part 2: paradise lost. Genesis 3 describes how everything went wrong. There we read that Adam and Eve believe the lie that life would be better if they rebelled against God and lived for themselves. And so, in disobedience to God, they eat from the forbidden tree.
 - Our passage today describes God’s response to their rebellion. Look at verse 23. **READ 23** – *Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden.*
- I want you to see that this sending them out is both an act of judgement and mercy.
 - It is first of all an act of mercy for God to cast them from his presence. Look at verse 22. **READ 22** – *Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”*
 - Sin and evil have filled the hearts of Adam and Eve. God does not want them to eat from the tree of life and so live forever in this fallen state. By banishing them from the Garden God mercifully ensures they will not live forever in a world that is not the way it’s supposed to be.
 - But this is also an act of judgement. Notice that it does not say he gently escorted them out of the garden. Look at verse 24. He drove them out. He threw them out. Like Jesus cleansing the temple, God cleanses his garden temple of those who practice sin.
- The comforts of paradise are gone but the main issue is that they are now separated from God. This is driven home by verse 24. **READ 24** – *He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*
 - “Cherubim” is the plural of “cherub” which means there was more than one. I don’t know what you think of when you think of a cherub but most of us imagine those cute cherubs in the paintings. **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** These chubby little diaper-wearing cherubs are pathetic. My four-year-old son Josh could knock one of these cherubs out with one punch.
 - These are not the cherubim of the Bible. Cherubim are a type of angel. Cherubim are fearful and awesome creatures. We read that these cherubim stand guard, with a flaming sword, blocking the way to the tree of life.
- Again, the main point here is that Adam and Eve have lost paradise. They are barred from going back into God’s presence. Again here we see the parallels with

the tabernacle and temple. The entire structure of the tabernacle is meant to drive home the point that paradise has been lost. How do we know this?

- God commanded that a thick veil be placed between the holy of holies (where his presence dwelled) and everything else. There is no question that this veil is meant to recall Adam and Eve being banished from the garden. How do I know this? Because God commanded that something be sewed onto that veil. Do you know what it was?
 - Exodus 26:31: *And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.* This veil, with its cherubim, that blocks people from coming into the Holy of Holies is meant to directly recall the garden temple and to drive home the fact that humanity has lost the paradise of God's presence.
 - Numbers 1:51, 53 also tell us that the Levite priests were to be stationed all around the tabernacle and they, like the cherubim, were to strike down anyone who tried to enter God's temple.
- Just in case you don't yet fully see the Garden and Temple connection, look again at verse 24. Notice where the entrance to the garden is: ***“He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim.”***
 - So the entrance to the Garden was on the East side. To enter the Garden where God dwelled meant you walked westward. Now are you ready for it? When God commanded the tabernacle and temple to be built which way do you think the door faced? East.¹
- The Garden of Eden was the archetypal temple. In other words, the tabernacle and temples of Israel were modeled after the garden. You entered the Garden from the east. To move west into the Garden was to enter into the holy of holies – the presence of God himself. In God's presence everything is good. To be in God's presence is to experience blessing with rivers, trees, abundant fruit, gold, and perfect relationship with God.
 - But paradise has been lost. For their sin, Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Holy of holies. The way back was blocked. Separated from God, humanity also lost the blessings of his presence.
 - This is the Bible's answer to what is wrong with the world. At rock bottom, all of our problems come back to the fact that we are separated from God and trying to live on our own.

LIFE EAST OF EDEN

- Genesis 4-11 then go on to demonstrate what life is like east of Eden – what life is like when we are separated from our Creator. And what is the very first story that follows Adam and Eve being cast out? It is the murder of Abel. Cain is filled with jealousy and kills his brother. Oh what a contrast to life in paradise.
 - For his actions God casts Cain even further away from his presence. Look at 4:16. **READ 16** – ***“Then Cain went away from the presence of the***

¹ A eastward facing Tabernacle (later Temple) can be inferred from the information about the court in Exodus 27:9-18, with a little help from Numbers 2:1-34 (note vs. 17). See also Ex 26:22; 35, Num 2:3, 3:38; Ezekiel 47:1, 2, 13; 43:13, 38:13, 40:6, 8:16, 11:1, 40:20.

LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.” To move eastward in Genesis is to move away from God’s presence and thus to move away from blessing. To move east is to move from hope to ruin.

- Chapter 5 gives us a genealogy of the ancient world. After naming each person, the chapter relentlessly says, “And he died.” Life east of Eden is filled with death. In chapter 6 life degenerates further and we read that people have become so wicked, corrupt, and violent that God brings the flood.
- This east theme continues in chapter 11. This is the story of Babel where humanity unites in independence against God. Turn to chapter 11. **READ 11:1-2** – ***“Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.”***
 - By saying it is in the east, Genesis is emphasizing that this story is not good. When Abraham and Lot divide, Lot moves east where he gets into great trouble. Sodom and Gomorrah are in the East. When Israel later refuses to go west into the Promised Land, God turns them eastward into the wilderness where an entire generation dies.
 - To move east is the symbolic way of saying that you are moving further away from the blessing of God’s presence and into ruin. So what you have here is clear biblical teaching for why you should never move to Toronto.
- Let’s summarize everything so far. The Bible says that at the end of the day there is ultimately one answer to what is wrong with the world.
 - Under all of our jealousy, under all our family conflict, under all murder, violence, corruption, and injustice, and under the fact that we will all die, is the fact that we are separated from God because of our sin.
 - The more we try to be our own gods the more we figuratively move east where things are not the way they’re supposed to be.

PARADISE SOUGHT

- We turn now to **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** part 3: paradise sought.
 - As human beings we are always seeking to fix our world and our personal lives. We want to return to paradise. Historically there are two ways people go about seeking paradise.
 - The first is through religion and the second is through irreligion.
- First, we try to seek paradise through religion. I mean here religion apart from Christianity. The history of religion is the history of humanity trying to get back to the divine, the gods, or God.
 - All religions are seeking some sort of paradise. Aside from Christianity, all religions say the same thing about how to seek paradise. They use different words but they all say, ***“if you do this and don’t do that, or follow these rules, or obey this teaching, then you will attain nirvana, or paradise, or whatever.”***
 - Religion says, ***“Obey and you will be accepted into paradise.”***

- The point is that you can do it. If you clean up your life, live morally, and do good things then when you die you will go to paradise.
 - But the Bible says, **“No, you can never achieve it because you can never get past the sword.”** No matter how good you have been, you have still sinned. You cannot, therefore, just walk past the cherubim and into the presence of God. You will be struck down.
 - Religion cannot bring us back to paradise because no amount of religious ritual can make up for our sin.
- The second way people seek paradise is through irreligion. The irreligious scoff at the religious people. They say there is no God and no life after death. The focus then becomes trying to establish paradise on earth.
 - As humanity entered the 20th century it was believed that the advances in science, education, and technology would lead us ever upward into paradise on earth. But then the century began with genocide in Armenia, degenerated into two World Wars, and ended with genocide in Rwanda.
 - It now seems incredibly naïve to think that humanity will ever achieve its own self-made paradise.
- And yet we all seek this and want this. It’s why so many of our stories end in a happily ever after. We long for this happily ever after, for this return to paradise, where everything is the way it’s supposed to be.
 - But listen, if there is no God and no paradise beyond this life, then every single happily ever after story is a giant lie. If there is no God then everything, including the universe, will end in death.
- Before he became a Christian, C.S. Lewis was an atheist. He struggled deeply with this issue. He loved the imaginary world of stories. They resonated deep within his soul. But he could not reconcile them with a life where there is no God.
 - He wrote, **“Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.”**² Although he loved the happily ever after stories he called them **“lies breathed through silver.”**³
 - More on Lewis in a few minutes but I am simply asking you to look deep inside. Why do you love these stories? Why do you hope things will turn out OK? Could it be that these are the echoes of Eden within your soul?
- In this third point I trying to show you that both religion and irreligion seek paradise but neither of them can give it to you.
 - No amount of religious rituals can get you past the sword and back into God’s presence in the Garden. Likewise, no amount of work by irreligious people will ever bring about the paradise on earth, the happily ever after, that we yearn for so much.

PARADISE GIVEN

² C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 138.

³ Preserved in Tolkien’s poem “Mythopoeia” and quoted in “On Fairy-Stories.”

- Now finally we come to the hope of Easter. I am calling this final part: **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** paradise given.
 - Although we cannot regain paradise, the good news of the Bible is that God has been working to bring us back. What we cannot do for ourselves God has done for us. What we could not earn we can receive as a free gift.
- Although we cannot go behind the veil, God can come from the other side to us. Two thousand years ago, God sent His Son Jesus through the veil. Jesus walked out of the Holy of Holies, out of the garden, and away from the presence of his Father. He took on human flesh and was born east of Eden.
 - He did not live like those in the east. He lived a perfect life of holiness. He then dealt with our sin at the cross. He took our sin upon himself. He became our substitute and took our punishment. He walked straight into the sword of judgement and was struck down. He was slaughtered not for his sin, for he did not have any. He was slaughtered for our sin. Jesus, the sin bearer, lay dead outside the garden.
- Oh but this was God's way to bring us back to paradise. Since Jesus paid for our sins, there is no more need for judgement. The way back to God has been opened. That is why we read that the moment Jesus died, ***"the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."*** The way back into the holy of holies is open.
 - Jesus took the judgement that we deserve so that we don't have to. After three days of lying dead outside the garden, God raised Jesus back to life.
 - Here then is the meaning of the resurrection. It is God's declaration that he accepts Jesus' payment of our debt. It is also the day God's new world began. It is God's demonstration that he is renewing all that was destroyed by sin. Jesus' powerful resurrection body is a preview of the bodies that all his people will one day receive. Jesus' resurrection body is a preview of a how God is going to renew not just our bodies but the entire earth – restoring it back to the way it is supposed to be.
- You see, through the risen Christ, God is working to renew all things. He promises that a day is coming when he will return and renew this earth into a paradise that mirrors and even exceeds Eden. In that day Revelation 21 says heaven, where God dwells, will come down to earth. God will once again dwell with his people.
 - Since God is present ***"there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*** Revelation 22 describes the new earth in Edenic terms. Here come the red cars. Gold is so common the streets are paved in it. The city is filled with precious stones. A great river of life flows out of the throne of God. There is the tree of life and there is no more curse.
 - But just like in Eden, there is one thing that defines paradise. It is described in my favourite five words in the Bible. They simply say of God's people that, ***"They will see his face."*** God will dwell among his people again.

- Do you see it? All of your deepest longings are fulfilled here. Your desire for paradise is not wish fulfillment. It is an ancient longing for what was lost. This is what turned Lewis to a Christian. His friend J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of the *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, explained to him that all the stories he loved were not lies – they contained fragments of truth and pointed to the one true story of Jesus Christ.
 - All the great stories contain echoes of God’s big story. There is a Prince who, like in *Sleeping Beauty*, has slain the dragon that holds us captive.
 - There is a place where, like in *Peter Pan*, we will never grow old.
 - There is a Hero, who like in all the superhero stories, will utterly vanquish evil.
 - There is a Prince who, like in *Cinderella*, has taken us from rags to the riches of being his bride.
 - There is a day coming when, like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, we will end our journey in the east and the ships will come to carry us home to the undying lands in the West, where white shores call and all turns to silver glass.
 - Christians can enjoy these stories and, when they are done, say to each other, ***“Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we will get all of this and far more.”***
- So you see Christianity is not religion or irreligion. It is something else entirely. Christianity says that although you cannot attain paradise Jesus has done it for you. He offers it freely to you. He has torn the veil. He took the sword for you. He now lives to save you. The way is open to the Holy of Holies.
 - The only question is if you will turn away from your life in the east and receive this gift he offers. Paradise is given to all who bow before Jesus and say, ***“I turn away from being my own god. I submit to you. Forgive my sins and bring me back to God.”***
 - Have you done this? The resurrection of Jesus is God’s great demonstration that God is working all things to a day when everything will be the way it’s supposed to be.