

# What's Wrong With the World? "Evil"

## Genesis 3:1

~ Delivered at Central Baptist on January 24, 2016

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Genesis 3.
- The question will not go away. Every new atrocity on the news provokes us to ask it again. What's wrong with the world?
  - Imagine attending that concert in Paris where ISIS attackers massacred 89 people. They stood above the crowd firing their machine guns and lobbing grenades into the multitudes of people.
  - Or imagine enjoying a nice dinner at one of the cafes in Paris when attackers suddenly open fire.
    - What's wrong with the world? Anyone who cares about justice cares about this question.
- Furthermore, we care about it on a personal level. What's wrong with me? Why do I have relational problems? Why do I often lose my patience? Why is my life a mess?
  - We try one solution after another and yet we cannot seem to solve our problems on a global or a personal level. What's wrong with the world?
- Today I want to begin a new series on Genesis chapter 3 that will take us through to Easter. Genesis 3 is, without doubt, one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible for here we discover Christianity's answer to what's wrong with the world.
  - In Genesis 1-2 we read that God created the world without evil. It is a place where Adam and Eve live in harmony with each other, with their own selves, with the earth, and with God himself.
    - But in Genesis 3 everything changes. Evil enters the world and everything falls apart.
- Many theologians use the metaphor of pollution to describe the Bible's teaching on evil and sin.<sup>1</sup> Pollution occurs when a contaminant is introduced into the natural environment bringing adverse affects.
  - We all remember the BP oil spill in 2010. 4.9 million barrels of oil filled the Gulf of Mexico. The effect on marine life was devastating. To pollute something is to defile it, like oil defiles the ocean.
- Genesis 1-2 state that God created his world without evil and sin but evil and sin, like oil in the Gulf, were introduced into God's creation. Evil, like pollution, defiled Adam and Eve and brought devastating effects to God's good world.
  - But Genesis 3 is not all bad news. Although Genesis 3 is about what's wrong with the world, it is also about what God is doing to renew his creation to the way it's supposed to be. Genesis 3 shows us how creation got polluted but it also shows how God is working to depollute it. Genesis 3 is about what's wrong with the world *and* what God's doing about it.

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<sup>1</sup> See, eg., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1941), 246; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1874), 2:230; Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), 243.

- Today we begin by talking about how evil polluted God’s good creation. I will develop this in three parts: the reality of evil, the mystery of evil, and the defeat of evil.

## THE REALITY OF EVIL

- Let’s begin then by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** the reality of evil.
  - In this first point I want to show you how Christianity offers you a robust and satisfying understanding for the existence of evil in the world.
- Gen 3:1 marks a critical turn in the Bible’s story. In Genesis 1-2 God is the main character. God is the one who speaks and creates the universe. Furthermore, Genesis 1-2 labours the point that everything in God’s creation is good.
  - As we turn to chapter 3 something changes. You see the shift in the first word of verse 1: “now.” Suddenly God, the main actor in the story, exits the stage. We do not hear his voice for quite some time. A new character appears. Now we hear a different voice.
- Let’s look at verse 1. **READ 1** – *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*
  - Let’s try to read this as if it was the very first time. If this was your first time reading verse 1 you would be jarred by the fact that a serpent speaks but not jarred by the fact that the serpent is said to be “crafty.”
- The word “crafty” does not necessarily have negative overtones. It means to be prudent, competent, or shrewd. Proverbs 1:4 says the naïve person needs to cultivate this trait.
  - Since everything in Genesis 1-2 is good we, as first time readers, just assume that this is one of God’s greatest creatures. For notice it also says this creature surpasses all others creatures in prudence, shrewdness, subtlety, and being clever – *“more crafty than any other beast of the field”*
- It only gradually dawns on us that the serpent’s great shrewdness has been turned to evil purposes. It is a gradual shock. You don’t realize what is going on until it is too late.
  - As one commentator writes, *“In that wondrous paradise, where all is peace and where the glory of God covers the whole scene, a note of rebellion is sounded. A creature of God utters words of revolt.”*<sup>2</sup>
    - A good creature has somehow become evil. A great gift of shrewdness has been twisted for evil purposes. It’s like when Sherlock Holmes says of a murderer: *“It’s a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all.”*<sup>3</sup>

## MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

- We are starting to see that there is more to this serpent than meets the eye.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward J. Young, *Genesis 3: A Devotional and Expository Study* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band,” *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Collection* (New York: Bedford Park Books, 2010), Kindle Edition, Location 9625.

- First, the serpent speaks. This is odd and it is meant to strike you as odd. Although the Bible does not tell us what communication was like in the Garden of Eden, the Bible does not portray the Garden as a fairyland where animals talk. Something more is going on here.
- Second, this is no ordinary serpent because it is a moral being. The serpent tells lies and incites rebellion against God. Later in chapter 3 God will hold the serpent morally accountable for its actions and pronounce judgement on it.
- Third, this is no ordinary serpent because it lives for a long time. In verse 16 God speaks of a future battle between one of Eve’s descendants and the serpent himself.
  - So in one sense it seems this is a serpent but in another it seems that a dark and supernatural power stands behind the snake.
- Genesis does not give us any clues beyond that but over time God pulls back the curtain to reveal more of who this serpent is. The New Testament asserts that the serpent is a supernatural being whom the Bible calls Lucifer, the devil, or Satan. In John 8:44 Jesus said of the devil, ***“He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”***
  - Revelation 12:9 speaks of, ***“that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”***<sup>4</sup>
    - Let me put it all together now: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** So the Bible says there is such thing as supernatural personal evil through which evil came into the world.
- We need to pause here because someone will say, ***“I can’t believe I’m hearing this. Are you seriously teaching educated 21<sup>st</sup> century people that there is a real devil?”*** Well, if you think all this talk about a real devil is ridiculous, let me ask you to consider three things. **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** First, consider your beliefs about God.
  - Do you believe God exists? Even in liberal minded British Columbia, the vast majority of people affirm they believe in God.
    - Now what do you believe God is like? The vast majority of people say the answer is patently obvious: “God is goodness and love.” OK, if it is so obvious to so many people that there is a good and loving supernatural being called “God”, then why is it so hard to believe there is a supernatural being that is evil?
- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Secondly, consider your assumptions about the devil.
  - The reason why people find it so absurd to believe in the devil is because they have an image of the devil in their minds. They imagine the devil as a horned man with a tail wearing full body red spandex and carrying a pitchfork. If that is the type of devil you don’t believe in then I am happy to tell you the Bible does teach about that kind of devil either.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Finally, consider your experience of evil.
  - For instance, how do you explain the actions of Luka Magnotta? Last year he killed and dismembered a Chinese student by the name of Lin Jun and then mailed his limbs to elementary schools and the offices of federal

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<sup>4</sup> See also Revelation 20:2 - “that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan.”

political parties. How do you explain teenage boys shooting their classmates? How do you explain the Holocaust?

- No doubt there are psychological explanations involving mental illness and bad fathers. No doubt there are sociological factors involving bad environments. But can any of these fully explain such horrific acts?
- The Bible says, ***“Stop begin so simplistic in your explanations. These things cannot be understood merely in psychological, biological, or sociological terms.”*** These may certainly be a part of it but the Bible says behind all these forces lies a powerful supernatural force that influences the world for evil.
- Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire is a Canadian and was the Force Commander of the United Nations peacekeeping effort in Rwanda. In 1994 he and his men were forced to stand by as Hutu’s slaughtered over 1 million Tutsis in 100 days. **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** I have been to the memorial in Kigali. **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** I took a picture at this spot. Under my feet there are 250,000 people buried in a mass grave. I’ve been in the room filled with skulls. There is a wing of the building dedicated to all the murdered children. I walked through with my eyes on the floor. I did not look up for the simple reason that I could not handle it.
  - Dallaire wrote a famous book entitled, *Shake Hands with the Devil*. In the final paragraph of the preface he writes the following:
    - ***“After one of my many presentations following my return from Rwanda, a Canadian Forces padre asked me how, after all I had seen and experienced, I could believe in God. I answered that I know there is a God because in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him and I have touched him. I know the devil exists and therefore I know there is a God.”***<sup>5</sup>
- What is your explanation for what is wrong with the world? Is it robust enough to account for the inconceivable acts of genocide? Do you have categories beyond your own personal feelings to explain the horrors of the Holocaust or of Paris?
  - Can you not feel that there is something more than just the survival of the fittest going on? That may explain why lions kill but human beings go far beyond just killing each other. We torture, rape, degrade, brutalize, and humiliate. No animal does that.
    - Again, the Bible says, ***“Stop being so simplistic in how you explain evil. Behind all the sociological, biological, and psychological factors that contribute to the atrocities of the world there is a dark power, a supernatural force, a malicious being who pollutes the world with evil.”*** This is the reality of evil.

## THE MYSTERY OF EVIL

- Let’s move now to the second heading: **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** the mystery of evil.
  - There is a lot of mystery in Genesis 3. In Genesis 1-2 you are reading along about a good God who creates everything that exists and suddenly

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<sup>5</sup> Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Failure of Humanity In Rwanda* (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2003), Kindle Edition, Location 134.

evil shows up in his good world. So the first mystery is this: where did evil come from if God is good and everything he created was good?

- Or consider a second mystery that my 9-year-old son Tyler always brings up. In his words, ***“Why didn’t God just kill Satan?”*** If God is all-powerful why does he allow evil to pollute his good creation?

## WHERE DID EVIL COME FROM?

- Let’s talk about these two mysteries. **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** First, where did evil come from if God is good and everything he created was good? Genesis 3 does not answer this question. The rest of the Bible, however, sheds some light on it but even that light is faint.
  - There are two chapters in the Old Testament that give prophecies about two different kings. The language however seems to go far beyond human kings. As a result, many Christians have seen in them a description of what we call the fall of Satan.
- Assuming this is correct, Ezekiel 28 says of Lucifer, ***“You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty”*** and that ***“You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.”***<sup>6</sup> If this is speaking of the devil it is saying Lucifer was originally part of God’s good creation but later wickedness was found in his heart. How did this happen?
  - Isaiah 14 sheds a bit more light when it says, ***“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”***<sup>7</sup>
    - Again, if we are right in this, Lucifer was not content with his role, even as the greatest among the angels. He wanted to be like God and so he rebelled.<sup>8</sup> For this he was judged and cast out of heaven. In anger the devil then made war on God by making war on his good creation. The devil entered the garden and led Adam and Eve into joining his revolt.
- Most of you have read J.R.R. Tolkien’s book *The Hobbit* or watched the movie. You may not know this but Tolkien wrote another book called *The Silmarillion* in which he describes how the fictional world of Middle Earth was created. It is strikingly similar to the Bible’s account. The Creator God is called “Ilúvatar” and the Satan figure is called “Melkor.”
  - In a magnificent passage Tolkien describes Ilúvatar singing creation into existence and he invites the Ainur, which are the equivalent of angels, to join in the song. It is then we read the following: ***“But now Ilúvatar sat and [listened], and for a great while it seemed good to him, for in the music there were no flaws. But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were***

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<sup>6</sup> Ez 28:12, 15

<sup>7</sup> Is 14:13-14.

<sup>8</sup> This is the very thing the devil tempts Adam and Eve with as well – to become like God. 1 Timothy 3:6 supports this when it warns that new believers should not be appointed as pastors or they “may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.”

*not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren. He had gone often alone into the void places...being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren. Some of these thoughts he now wove into his music, and straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang [near] him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. Then the discord of Melkor spread ever wider, and the melodies which had been heard before foundered in a sea of turbulent sound...and it seemed at last that there were two musics progressing at one time before the seat of Ilúvatar, and they were utterly at variance.”<sup>9</sup>*

- So where does the Bible say evil came from? I’ll put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** The Bible does not tell us how an evil thought could arise in the heart of a good creature but it does trace the origin of evil in our world to the serpent.

#### **WHY DIDN’T GOD STOP EVIL?**

- So let’s turn to the second mystery: **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** If God is all-powerful why did he allow evil to pollute his good creation? Here we must *not* say the serpent’s actions took God by surprise or that God could not stop the serpent for everywhere the Bible presents God as all knowing and all powerful. So God clearly allowed it.
  - But the Bible goes even further than this. It teaches that *before* God created the world, and therefore *before* the serpent came into the garden, God planned the death of his Son. 1 Peter 1:20 says, “[Jesus] was chosen *before the creation of the world.*” Revelation 13:8 says Jesus is “*the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.*”
- Follow me on this: if God planned to rescue sinners like you and I through the death of his Son *before* he created the world, it means that the serpent’s actions are part of God’s great plan.
  - Now we must hasten to say that God is not responsible for evil. Always and ever the Bible teaches that “*God is light and in him there is no darkness at all*” and yet, in some mysterious way, even the existence of evil fits into his great plan to show his glory.
    - Ephesians 1 goes even further. It not only states that God planned all this before he created the world but that since God works out everything in conformity with his will, even evil itself, will be used for the praise of his glorious grace.
- Tolkien has two incredible lines in *The Silmarillion* that also speak this way. After Melkor creates disharmony in the song of creation Ilúvatar stands and speaks. For clarity I will modernize some of Tolkien’s language. Ilúvatar says,

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<sup>9</sup> J.R.R. Tolkein, ed. Christopher Tolkein, *The Silmarillion* (London: Harper Collins ebooks, 2009), Kindle Edition, Location 433.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** *“And you, Melkor, will see that no theme may be played that does not have its uttermost source in me, nor can anyone alter the music without me. For he that attempts this will only end up being my instrument in the planning of more wonderful things, which he himself has not even imagined.”*<sup>10</sup>
  - This reminds me of the time Joseph said to his brothers, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish.”*<sup>11</sup>
- My favourite, however comes later when Ilúvatar describes how the evil that Melkor will bring into the lives of Men will be turned for Ilúvatar’s own purposes.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** *“But Ilúvatar knew that Men being set amid the turmoils of the powers of the world, would stray often, and would not use their gifts in harmony; and he said, ‘These too in their time shall find that all that they do redounds at the end only to the glory of my work.’”*<sup>12</sup>
    - That is the same as Ephesians 1:11 saying that God **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** *“works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.”*
- So in working through the mystery of evil the Bible calls us to hold many truths together. **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** First, God, who created all things, has no evil in his being. Second, evil came into the world through the serpent. Third, God was not surprised by, or unable to stop, evil from coming into the world. And fourth, in some mysterious way God will use evil for his good purposes.

## THE DEFEAT OF EVIL

- **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** In the final place let’s talk about the defeat of evil. The Bible may not answer every question about where evil comes from but it most certainly answers what God will do about evil.
  - We will look at this in more detail in a few weeks but look over at 3:15-16. As soon as evil pollutes the world, God immediately promises to renew his creation. God promises to defeat and destroy evil. He pronounces a curse on the serpent.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** **READ 14-15** - *“So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.””*
  - To eat dust is to be defeated. It is the defeated who lick the dust off the boots of the victor. So how will God defeat evil? Through one of Eve’s male offspring. We read that this male child will do battle with the serpent himself, and though this man will be injured, he will crush the head of the serpent.

<sup>10</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, Location 458.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 50:20.

<sup>12</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, Location 830.

- Jesus, the human male, defeated Satan at the cross when he took away our sins. He defeated the devil in conquering death itself.<sup>13</sup>
- In light of this Colossians 2:15 says, ***“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*** These words ***“disarmed”***, ***“made a public spectacle”*** and ***“triumph”*** recall the days when a Roman general would return to Rome from war to meet Caesar in a great victory parade.
  - For instance when the Roman General Aemilius Paulus returned from capturing Macedonia there was a three-day parade of triumph in which all enemy’s treasures were paraded through the city. On the third day came the defeated armies stripped naked and locked in chains. After that the king of Macedonia stripped of his armour, chariot, and crown.
    - Finally came the victorious general ***“...seated on the chariot magnificently adorned, dressed in robe of purple, interwoven with gold, and holding a laurel branch in his right hand. All the army, in like manner, with boughs of laurel in their hands, divided into their bands and companies, followed the chariot of their commander; some singing verses, according to the usual custom of songs of triumph, and the praise of Aemilius’ deeds.”***
- Through his death and resurrection Jesus defeated evil and when he returns one day he will destroy evil forever. On that day the devil, who deceived the peoples of the earth will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur and he will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
  - So you see this is where Christianity offers great hope to the world and to our lives. Not only does Christianity gives us categories to think through the worst atrocities in human history, it also says there is hope for us. Christ has triumphed over evil and all who join him will one day live in a world depolluted of all evil.
    - It is for this reason that we have hope in this world for although God’s purposes in allowing evil are still largely a mystery to us, we sing with that 500-year-old hymn,
      - ***“And tho this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us. We will not fear for God hath willed, His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure: One little world shall fell him.”***

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<sup>13</sup> Theologian Henri Blocher vividly explains this truth: “Evil is conquered as evil because God turns it back upon itself. He makes the supreme crime, the murder of the only righteous person, the very operation that abolishes sin. The maneuver is utterly unprecedented. No more complete victory could be imagined. God responds in the indirect way that is perfectly suited to the ambiguity of evil. He entraps the deceiver in his own wiles. Evil, like a judoist, takes advantage of the power of good, which it perverts; the Lord, like a supreme champion, replies by using the very grip of the opponent.”