

The Story That Makes Sense of our Stories

“Evil”

Genesis 3:1-7

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INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01)** In this series we are asking what story makes the best sense of our lives and the universe we find ourselves in. Today we’re going to ask what story makes the best sense of the fact that evil exists in our world.
 - You see, on the one hand this world is an amazing place and human beings are incredible creatures but on the other hand we also know there is something desperately wrong with the world.
 - And if we’re going to be honest we also know there is something wrong with each of us. Ask yourself: Why do I have relational problems? Why do I often lose my patience? Why is my life a mess?
- Today we’re going to begin to hear the Bible’s answer to this from Genesis 3. Genesis 3 is, without doubt, one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible. Here we discover the Bible’s answer to what’s wrong with the world.
 - So far, the Bible’s story has been about how good God’s original creation was. 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.
- Think of the Bible’s answer to where evil came from in our world like pollution. Pollution occurs when a contaminant is introduced into the natural environment and it brings terrible effects.
 - Do you 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.
 - So today we’re going to hear start hearing the Bible’s answer to our question of what’s wrong with the world. We will continue this for the next few weeks.

THE REALITY OF EVIL

- Let’s begin then by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 02) 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, especially in comparison to other stories that have been given.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 03)** 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: **(SHOW SLIDE 04) “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. **(SHOW SLIDE 05) 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 you would not be 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 become wise by becoming shrewder.
 - 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.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 06) Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.**
- 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.
 - 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: **(SHOW SLIDE 07) “It’s a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all.” (Sherlock Holmes)¹**

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 08)** We are starting to see that there is more to this serpent than meets the eye.
 - 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.

¹ 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.

- 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, **(SHOW SLIDE 09)** **“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, **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** **“that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”**
 - Let me put it all together now: **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** **The Bible’s story teaches that there is such thing as supernatural personal evil through which evil came into the world.**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 12)** We need to pause here because someone will say, **“So far in this series I can see how the Christian story does make sense of the universe and our lives. But this is just bizarre! Are you seriously saying modern educated people should believe in the existence of a real devil?** Well, if you think all this talk about a real devil is ridiculous, let me ask you to consider three things. First, **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** **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 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 might also be a supernatural being that is evil?
- Secondly, **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** **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.
- But finally, and most importantly, **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** **consider your experience of evil.**
 - For instance, how do you explain the actions of Luka Magnotta? This young man 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 political parties. How do you explain teenage boys shooting their classmates? How do you explain the Holocaust?
 - What is the story you believe about all of this that can explain such horrific things? Some people tell it through a psychological story: mental illness and bad fathers. Some people tell it through sociology: grew up in bad environments. But can any stories of psychology and sociology fully explain such horrific acts
 - The Bible says, **“Stop being 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.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** 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. Most of this was done with machetes. Neighbours slaughtered neighbours.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** I have been to the memorial in Kigali, which is the capital city of Rwanda **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** 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:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** **“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.”²**
- Now if you do not believe that, then let me ask you what story you believe makes the best sense of evil in the world?
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 20)** Here’s what I know: you do believe in evil. You don’t just call the holocaust a mistake or an error. You call it evil.
 - You also believe that evil is not defined just by our own culture or people’s personal preferences. No, you condemn the atrocities of the Residential Schools or African American slavery as evil acts.
 - You don’t say, “Well, that was their truth and we have our truth.” No, you believe certain things were evil in 3000BC and will still be evil if we’re still here in 3000AD.
 - So what story makes the best sense of the fact that we all believe evil exists, that it truly is evil, and not just something that goes against our private beliefs?
- 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?
 - The modern secular story says it is all just the survival of the fittest. 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.

² Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Failure of Humanity In Rwanda* (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2003), Kindle Edition, Location 134.

- Again, the Bible says, ***“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 21) 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 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 kids often ask: ***“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 22) Mystery #1: 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 very 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, **(SHOW SLIDE 23) “You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty . . . You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.” (Ezekiel 28:12, 15).** 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, **(SHOW SLIDE 24) “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.’ (Isaiah 14:13-14)**
 - 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.³ The devil makes war on God by making war on his good creation. The devil entered the garden and led Adam and Eve into joining his revolt.

³ 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.”

- So where does the Bible say evil came from? I'll put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 25) The Bible's story 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 26) Mystery #2: 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, **(SHOW SLIDE 27) "[Jesus] was chosen before the creation of the world."** Revelation 13:8 says Jesus is **(SHOW SLIDE 28) "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 **(SHOW SLIDE 29) "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5)** 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.
 - Even though the devil attempts to ruin God's creation and his plan, he will only end up being an instrument in God's hands to accomplish things more wonderful than we have every imagined.
 - It's like when Joseph said to his brothers, **(SHOW SLIDE 30) "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish." (Genesis 50:20).**
 - Or in the words of Ephesians 1:11: **(SHOW SLIDE 31) "[God] 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's story calls us to hold many truths together. **(SHOW SLIDE 32) 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

- In the final place let's talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 33) the defeat of evil**. The Bible's story may not answer every question about where evil comes from but it most certainly answers what God will do about evil.
 - 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 34) "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.'" (Genesis 3:14-15)**
 - 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.
 - Jesus, the human male, defeated Satan at the cross when he took away our sins. He defeated the devil in conquering death itself.
- In light of this Colossians 2:15 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 35) "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.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 36)** 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,
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 37)** *“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 word shall fell him.”*