

East of Eden

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from Genesis chapter 3. We are going through a series on Genesis 3 at the moment. This is the next section. The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. 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 off the tree of life and eat, and live forever.

Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 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.

This is God's Word. Today we're finishing a series that we've been doing on the chapter, Genesis 3. Five weeks just in this one chapter looking at this little piece of the book that's called Genesis. And Genesis means beginnings. So it tells you about the beginnings of human history. It tells you about fundamentally who we are, what we were made for. The Hebrew word that describes the whole of the first five books of the Bible is the word Torah.

[1 : 18] Torah, and sometimes we translate it as law, but actually Torah means more like the way of instruction, the way of living life in general. And so it's got underneath it questions like, who am I?

Who made me? You know, you don't get to any laws in the Torah until 69 chapters in. So the first 68 chapters are about who made you, where did you come from, who are you made to be, what are you for, and fundamentally what's wrong with you?

What's wrong with this world? And we all feel that, that there's something wrong with this world.

There's something wrong with us. We're not the way we're supposed to be. So Genesis 3 exists to tell us from God's mouth, what is wrong?

What is wrong with this world? What is wrong with us? What is wrong with me? Our culture, when it asks that question, comes and says something typically like, we are born good, but we become bad.

Our culture tends to, tends to think collectively that the reason that we do evil, the reason that anybody does evil in this world, is not because we're born that way, but because we become that way through our environment, through things that have happened to us, through experiences, through trauma.

[2 : 29] And so the heartbeat, I think of modern Edinburgh, is that my, is I want to be able to say, my delinquency is a product of other people's actions against me. And I think that what we're doing in our culture at large, is trying to look for a way desperately to say, it is not my fault.

It's not me. I didn't do it because I'm bad. I did it because somebody else treated me bad. And while there are truths there, while our environment does indeed, create problems in our life, and patterns. Genesis 3 comes and asks you, do you have the courage to say, hi, it's me. I'm the problem. It's me. Had to get that in somewhere in this series.

And some of you will have to explain it to your neighbor later. That is the thing it's saying. You know, every broken clock is right twice a day. And it really is, I'm the problem.

It's me. That's what Genesis 3 wants you to say. And it's not that there are good guys in here, and bad guys out there. It's not that we are born good, but we become evil. But this text tells us that we are evil from the inside out.

[3 : 33] And the word evil in the Bible, in the Old Testament, doesn't mean maximally bad. It means that we are not who we should be. Our desires are bent and broken, and we lean towards trespass.

And so one of the ways you can talk about Genesis 3 is not just as the fall story, but as the trespass story. Where Adam and Eve cross a boundary that they were not supposed to cross. They were made in God's image.

But what they did was they said, I don't want to be in the image of God. I want to be God. And so they crossed a boundary and reached out and seized, attempted to try and take divinity for themselves.

And that's me. That's you. That's every single human being that's ever been made in world history. And we've learned every week that the product of that has been a state of sin.

We don't become sinners. We are sinners. We're in a condition of sin. The Heidelberg Catechism says we have brought misery into this world by the condition of sin that we introduced to this world from the beginning.

[4 : 33] And so every week we've said that our sin has cost us alienation from ourselves. We don't know ourselves. We're not honest with ourselves. Alienation from other people.

Adam blamed his wife for everything. Marriage is broken. It's very difficult. Alienation from the land. Alienation from our work. Alienation from all we were made to be. And most importantly, alienation from God himself.

We hide from God. Today, finally, we see at the end of this passage, we're also, very importantly, we're alienated from home. We're not where we were meant to be.

We've been alienated because of our sin from Edenic life, from the Garden of Eden. We've been kicked out. And so let's think about that. We are living east of Eden.

And is there a way back? Yes. Let's look at that secondly. And then thirdly, in the meantime, let's think about some things we can do to long and hope for Eden.

[5 : 33] Okay, so first, living life east of Eden. That's where we are right now. That's what the text tells us. We were in, my family and I, we were in Harris last week, last weekend, not here on the Sunday, and we were coming back from Harris.

It's a long trip, the Isle of Harris, back to Edinburgh. Seven hours if you go quickly, but when you've got five children in the car, it's more like ten. And we left Tarbert and Harris to go to Stornoway to get the ferry.

And if you don't know, that's an hour drive, of a seven hour drive. And about halfway between Tarbert and Stornoway, the youngest in the car who can speak English, said, ugh, are we home yet?

And you said, buddy, we've got eight hours. Okay? And of course, every 20, 30 minutes, the same question would come back up and up. And you've been there. Every single one of us, when we are on a trip like that, we long for the moment that you step through your front door and you drop your bags at 11 p.m. at night, like us, and you say, sweet relief.

I'm home. We, let's get right to the point today, we are not home. We were made for life in the Garden of Eden with the living God.

[6 : 50] And we've been kicked out. We're not home. And we see that right here. It says in verse 23 and 24 that because of our sin, God drove us out from the Garden of Eden away from His presence.

And we've been living life east of Eden ever since that moment. But here's the big point today, and this is the spiritual burden, I think, of the text for all of us. And that's, though we are not home.

Christian, if you're a Christian today, you are not home. And if you're not a Christian today, no matter what you believe in, if you've come curious, exploring, you're not home either. you were made for life with God in the Edenic realm, in Eden, and you're not home either.

But we struggle to actually want that. So we are far away from home, yet we don't think about it. We don't dream about it. We don't imagine it. We don't long for it.

We live life east of Eden, yet we don't hunger most of the time for Eden, for the place that God put us. We don't desire enough the true home that God has made for us.

[7 : 51] And so we just let it be. We just get on with our daily life. And so here in verse 24, it says that God drove Adam and Eve east of Eden. About 200 years before Jesus was born in Alexandria, Egypt, a group of Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament Hebrew Bible into Greek.

And we call that the Septuagint. And this is the Bible that Jesus largely read from, the Septuagint, and it's often quoted in the Gospels itself. And in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, this word Eden in Genesis 3 is just the Greek word paradise.

And so in the Old Testament, it's very clear that the Jewish understanding of Eden is a garden paradise, a place of, you can translate the word Eden very literally to all around delight. It could read like that. And when we get kicked out of the Garden of Eden in verse 24 here, we learn that from the very beginning, there was land outside of the Garden of Eden. So when God created the world, he created lots of lands, the whole world, and he picked a spot to make his holy garden temple, his throne room on earth.

And he came into that spot to dwell with humanity, to partner with humanity, to make home with us. And so we learn here that there are lands outside of the Garden of Eden in the early days. And they are good, but they're not Eden.

[9 : 19] They're not the harmony, the glory, the abundance of Eden. They're not life with God. They're not home with God. Not exactly. But when Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden, they go east of Eden, they bring corruption, the state of sin, the state of misery, the condition that they're in, into the rest of the world, into the lands.

And so if you go and read Genesis 4 to 11, it's basically an account of the cancer that Adam and Eve were and brought in their sin into the rest of the land, the corruption of the rest of the world. But we were made for Eden. We were made for a home greater than just the land, for the Edenic life itself. Now, my burden today is to say simply this, that because none of us have ever lived anything but east of Eden, we don't know what we're missing.

We don't know the abundance of the life that God had intended for us. And so we don't really want it. We don't want it because we don't realize what it is.

Abraham Kuyper was a Dutch theologian in the early 20th century, prime minister in the Netherlands, and he spent a good bit of his corpus, he wrote a lot, and one of the things he did was he thought a lot about Eden, and he writes about it in one place, and he's just trying to cultivate an image of the Edenic life for us, to cultivate desire in our heart for true home.

[10 : 44] And this is what he says. He says, There are flowers so delightfully beautiful as we no longer know them, foliage that by shape and intense color entice the eye, trees that far exceed the cedar and the palm in splendor.

Inexpressible gloriousness all around. The Garden of Eden throbbed with life through the songbirds and the branches and the noble, pure-blooded animals that populated paradise newly created by God in undamaged perfection.

And he says, The animal world, in the animal world, peace reigned. There was no tormenting insects, no midges. He didn't say that. I added that part. But no midges, if you're from the U.S., no mosquitoes, no prowling tigers, that raised its paws against us.

And here's the big piece. Listen to this. He says, Everything was, of course, still far more beautiful and glorious than our words could possibly sketch. Paradise is gone, and the only imagination, only the imagination, can to some extent bring it back to us.

Paradise is far gone. We don't know yet what we're missing. C.S. Lewis writes about this in his book, *Surprised by Joy*. So in *Surprised by Joy*, he writes an account of his own biography and how he came from atheism to Christianity.

[12 : 08] And it's a beautiful little book. But in it, he says that every time he reads about Eden in the Bible, he thinks about his childhood, and he goes back to this moment with his brother in their family home in Ireland.

And he says his brother would take a biscuit tin, you know, one of the really nice biscuit tins, the gift tins, you know. And he would take it and he would put flowers and plants from the garden, wildflowers, and he would organize the flowers and the plants and the grass all on top of this biscuit tin.

And they would play like they had built their own little garden. And then the light in the back garden, the sunshine, would shine down on the biscuit tin and it would reflect up from the metal of the tin and shine up through the lights, through the flowers, the grass.

And he said, every time he opens the Bible and he reads about Eden, he images this tin, the light refracting, reflecting up through the flowers and the grass that his brother made, conjuring, creating an imagination of moments of what it must be like to be in the Garden of Eden, life with God from the beginning.

And if you've read that book, you might know that he attaches a word to that, a German word, *Zenzucht*, and he grabs hold of this German word to try to take hold of something we don't quite have in English.

[13 : 25] And for him, what Zenzucht means is something like a description of the intense longing, the intense longing for something you've never actually experienced.

An intense, desperate longing, a hole in your heart, you know, there's a hole in your heart, a God-shaped hole, life in Eden, an Edenic hole in your heart, and you've got a longing, a Zenzucht, a deep desire for something that you've never actually tasted.

True home. And so, long before C.S. Lewis ever said that, Abraham Kuyper, he put it like this, he said, none of us who have ever been conceived and born in this sinful world can get a full, profound impression of what that heavenly paradise must have been like.

Only one day when we rise from the dead will we have the receptive capability to perceive such inexpressible glory and beauty. He says, we do not long for enough.

We do not long for more because we have never experienced the more. And he goes on, he says, we must not put our highest desires lower than what God has destined for us.

[14 : 39] Friends, when you read about Eden and you read about true home, do not put your greatest desires lower than what God has destined for you. long for an overabundance that you cannot imagine.

Life with God, life in the Edenic realm. He says, we're homesick for too little because we desire too little. We haven't clearly recognized from how high a state of bliss and heavily overabundance we have fallen.

We cannot gauge the depth into which sin has thrown us east of Eden. We're in exile. We're east of Eden. We are not home.

And because of that, we've got an Edenic and God-shaped hole in our heart that cannot be filled until this life in Christ brings us back.

There's no win in this life, there's no next thing coming in this life that will ever fill the God-shaped hole, the Edenic hole in your heart for true home.

[15 : 39] The next job won't do it. The next relationship won't do it. The next big win won't do it. The step up in career, the step up in reputation, it won't do it. There's a God-shaped hole and the only thing that will ever fill it is going home again.

Secondly, is there a way back? Yes, the text tells us here. This text actually tells us. You don't even have to go to the rest of the Bible to hear that there is a way back. In verse 22, we're told that the Lord God kicks Adam and Eve out because the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

So we're told here in the passage the reasons that we've been driven out from the garden. The first reason, God says, is because we know good and evil like God. Now, God knows about evil.

He's gone toe-to-toe with evil. He knows about it. But the word know here is very intimate. It's saying that we now, because of our choices, we know evil intimately. And so the first reason we're told that we've been driven out of Eden is because evil cannot stand inside the garden temple of God.

It cannot be near unto God's presence. And so we're driven away because we've made an intimate relationship with evil itself. We've become sinners. But then he goes on from there and gives you the second reason.

[16 : 55] And here's the real heartbeat. In verse 23, it says, sorry, the end of verse 22, lest we reach out and take and eat from the tree of life, he sends us away.

Lest we reach out and we take and we eat from the tree of life and we live forever, God banishes us. Now, the tree of life, this beautiful tree in the midst of the garden of Eden, God tells you that one of the reasons that you cannot be in Eden at this moment is lest you reach out your hand and you take and you eat from the tree.

The tree of life is a sacrament. So in the New Testament, in the New Covenant, in our church, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and that's a sacrament. So we come and we taste physical bread, physical wine, and in that physical experience, God communicates to us a spiritual reality through the physical experience.

In the same way in the Garden of Eden, there's a sacrament at the heart of the Garden of Eden, this physical reality, the tree of life, and you reach out and you take of it, you taste of it, and it's God communicating to you life.

And somehow, someway in the Garden of Eden, the tree of life, this sacrament, gives the gift of everlasting physical life. So when you, excuse me, when you take and you eat of it, it

communicates to you like a sacrament, physical, enduring, everlasting life.

[18:17] And the reason that God says to Adam and Eve, I'm kicking you out of the Garden, lest you take, lest you eat, is why? It's because He's saying to them, you think, Adam and Eve, human being, you think that you can say to God, I don't want you, I don't want relationship with you, I don't want my father, but I want to stay in the home He built for me, and only take the benefits.

I want to be able to stay here and get immortal life, I want physical life, I want everlasting life, I want the goods that you've made for me, but I don't want you. And God's saying, you think, you think that you can reject the God who made you, the Creator who made you, trespass against Him and say, we want you dead, like the prodigal son in Luke 15 who says to the Father, I will take my third, I will take my inheritance, I wish you were dead, I want your benefits, I don't want you.

And He says, you can't reject God, human being, and then come and say, but I really like the benefits you made for me. You can't reject God and say, but I do want the immortal life that you had promised. I want to eat from the tree of life and take that gift.

And you know, what is God doing here? He's saying, lest you continue to take and reach and reach and reach and seize the immortal life, the gifts that I've given you, and continue to reject me, I banish you.

In other words, what is He doing? He's saying, He's saying, I am kicking you out of the Garden of Eden so that you can be redeemable. You see, if you're left to the Garden, in the Garden of Eden, with your sin, all you will do is loot the tree of life forever and stay in exactly the condition you're in.

[19:59] You'll continue over and over again to say, I'm okay. I've got pleasure forevermore. I'm happy to take the goods and leave the God behind who made them. And you see what God's doing?

He's saying, I have kicked you, I have exiled you from the Garden of Eden so that you will be able to come home again. It's mercy. Lest they eat of the tree of life and become irredeemable in their condition.

God says, you're banished so that you will see your need to come home. He's doing nothing but showing them mercy. Now, how does He do that? Verse 22, in verse 22 it says that He clothed them in skins from animals.

So God, on their way out, takes an animal and sacrifices the animal and puts clothes on their naked bodies, gives them new clothing. And when He says that, He's saying, I will clothe you temporarily by the substitutionary death of another.

If you're going to go live east of Eden, you need to know that the only way you're going to be able to come home again is through the substitutionary death of another. And through the death of animals, just in a temporary way, you see there's a shadow, there's a prefigurement, there's something being promised.

[21:20] By the death of another, you could be clothed in grace. And then even Adam starts to realize that in verse 20, foolish Adam, he's been very foolish, but in this moment he looks over at the woman Eve and it says that he names her Eve.

So, so far in the text, in Hebrew, Eve has only been called woman, never named. Adam's only been called Adam, which in Hebrew just means man, so he's never really named Eve either.

But in this moment, the only human to get a proper name, in verse 20, Adam looks over at Eve and he says, Eve. And this is not like Adam in chapter 2, naming the animals with authority over them precisely.

This is Adam recognizing something in her. You see what's happening? Adam looks at the woman and he says, in this woman is the possibility of true life. And so he names her Eve, the mother of all living.

Eve in Hebrew sounds like the life-giving one, the one from whom life shall come. What is he doing? He is connecting the pieces, the dots, and he's saying, Genesis 3.15, God had promised one day the seed of the woman would be born to crush the head of the serpent.

[22:32] Now he's saying, wait a minute, there she is, Eve, the mother of all living, the one from whom the seed will one day come. You start to put the pieces together and you realize that in this text alone, God is saying that one day, through the son of Eve, a son shall be born by whose sacrifice new clothes, new garments shall be put on your back.

Through substitutionary atonement, a sacrifice will be made by which you could be clothed and then maybe, maybe the tree of life would be open to you again. Maybe you could step back in. Friends,

in the New Testament, on the day that Jesus Christ died on the cross, do you remember that the curtain was torn in two?

And embroidered on the curtain, what is it? It's plants, foliage, garden images, and cherubs. You see, there's a cherub guarding the way to the Garden of Eden.

But when Jesus Christ died, the curtain was torn in two. And Jesus said to the cherub that day, you're fired. You can go home. Your day job has ended.

And Jesus Christ's dead body was put into a garden. Why? Why did, why was, you see, Jesus' dead body was put into the garden.

[23 : 53] He was buried in a garden. So that by the sacrifice through the death of another, we could say, he could say, look, the debt is paid, Father. The victory has been won so that on the day of resurrection, Jesus Christ could open the gate to the Garden of Eden and could say to every single one of you, the cherub's been kicked out.

Now the cherub is simply one who stands by the grave, folds the clothes and says, come on and see. Come and see. The way of the Garden is open to you. The way of the Garden is open to you. True home is open to you again through Jesus Christ.

And the invitation today is to simply see one thing and that's what sin has taken away from us in this life east of Eden, Jesus Christ will give far more.

Somehow, somehow, when we step into the Edenic life one day, we will look back at just the faintest memory of the pain and the toil and the struggle and the strife of this life and we will say, for all the pain we experienced, what sin did to us, Christ has given far more.

His plaster is wider than the wound that sin ever created. And so let me finish with this. We now are living in the time between Eden and Eden.

[25 : 13] We're living east of Eden. What can you do today while you wait? And let me give you two things to do and we'll close. I was reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who resisted Hitler and was assassinated, murdered by Hitler for that.

But he wrote a commentary on this text and in his comments on this little passage, he says that ever since this moment we have been living east of Eden, we've been living, he says, in the twilight land.

That's what he calls it. So he uses the two Hebrew words here for good and evil, which is tov and ra. And he says, the life we live east of Eden is the life between tov and ra, the life in the middle of good and evil.

And he calls it the twilight. He says, we live in the time between the darkness and the light. And the reason he says that, what's one of the first things you need to do with a text like this?

You need to realize all of us today, we're living between the light and the darkness. And so in this life, when you get closer to moments of life, of light, the best possible moments you've ever had, the most enjoyable moments, the best relationships, the best moments of light, you get really close to the light, you start to think this life is really great.

[26 : 32] It feels a little bit like the Garden of Eden. But on the flip side, some of us may be walking a lot closer to the darkness right now and getting really close to the darkness and feeling like this life is pretty close to hell.

And Bonhoeffer says one of the things we've got to see is Jesus, God, did not banish us into hell. He did not banish us into torment. He banished us into the twilight land, the land between good and evil, the land between light and darkness.

And that means that in the moments, the best possible moments you've ever had in your life, you've got to remember, you've got to remember, you are not yet home. In the worst possible moments you ever have in this life, the darkest moments in this life, you are not in hell.

This land is east of Eden, but it is not hell. And so that means that we can look up and we can say, I'm so grateful for so much of the good that God continues to pour into my life.

I'm so grateful for the sunshine coming in today and the beauty of a city like Edinburgh and all the good moments. And at the same time, boy, I'm made for far more than this. I long for so much more. I long to return to the Edenic life, to true home.

[27 : 41] Now, this gives you incredible explanatory power because you can say today, this is why the best things in this life never really satisfy, right?

So you come and you get the next job you were waiting for. And you get that job and a week or two in, somebody asks you, how's it going? And you say, you know, I like it, but it's kind of meh.

And you get into the next relationship you've been longing for for so many years and you finally get there and you realize in the midst of it, this is so hard and it's a little bit meh sometimes. You know, that theological word meh.

You feel that. We always, you get the next thing you desire so much and then it's not really filling the hole. And that's because you're living east of Eden. You're living in the twilight land.

Life between the tov and the ra, the good and the evil. And so nothing's ever going to do it. Nothing is ever going to do it. I hope this will sound the way I intend it.

[28 : 38] I came and moved to Edinburgh to do a PhD and I did that. And I really, in my younger years, thought, oh, this will be very fulfilling and I will be, it will be very special to get a degree like this, you know.

And I remember turning my PhD thesis in, down in George Square, and I handed it in and the lady that received it, the printed copy, asked me if I would like to take a piece of candy from the candy box.

I'm very serious. That's what happened. And I thought, life is meh, you know. You think you've accomplished something and no one cares.

And that's exactly right. You live east of Eden. Nothing will fill you. Nothing will bring the abundance to your life that you long for apart from home with God. So finally, what can you do?

What you've got to do until then is you've got to see that and you've got to come to Christ who clothes you with better clothing than your naked shame, who clothes you with better clothing than anyone else can give you, who will usher you into Eden.

[29 : 46] And one of the things you can do with that is you can go to the book of Revelation, Revelation 22, where we see the Edenic life imaged. And you've got to meditate on it.

And you've got to read lines like, when the Lord Jesus brings heaven to earth, when he brings the new Eden to us, it says that the leaves of the tree of life will heal all the nations.

So if you're burdened by the wars that are going on right now, by the pain, the toil, the strife, the earthquake that's killed at least 2,000 people in Myanmar this week, you've got to come and say, one day in the Edenic life, the leaves of the tree of life himself will heal the nations.

And it will cure the land. And it says right after that in Revelation 22, that the curse will be dismissed and it shall be no more. And if you're facing death right now, you're facing this physical life that's so hard, you've got to say, he will kick the curse out of the garden.

He will heal the land. He will bring us back from east of Eden. He will bring us back to true home. Jesus Christ gives far more than sin ever took away. Let us pray.

[30 : 53] Father, we ask that you would cultivate in us longing for real home. And we pray, Father, that in the midst of the times we are too satisfied with this life, you would break through that and show us we're not where we were meant to be, who we were meant to be with.

And in the moments where we are very close to darkness in this life, you would remind us that this is not hell. You are giving us time. You are patient. You are drawing us back, Lord.

So help us to come back, to come home today. And I pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.