

Breaking Bad

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[0 : 00] Now, if you have Bibles beside you, please turn back to Genesis chapter 3. As we continue in its early stages, look at the story of the Old Testament because that story involves us, and it helps us to understand not only about Jesus Christ and the gospel, but about who we are, and about the world around us. Surprising though, that may seem in the 21st century, is hugely relevant and hugely significant, none more so than this chapter 3 of Genesis, which we're only going to look at the beginning of because there is so much in it.

Now, I wonder if you've ever thought of the relationship between being in control and also trusting, because there is a very close, there's an interesting interface between the two.

Now, being in control and the pursuit of knowledge are also linked, and pursuing knowledge, pursuing information is absolutely natural, and it's good. But it can, in our lives and in our world, as we know, become about obsessive control, that we need to know because we need to be in charge of our lives. We don't like variables that are outside of our control. We like to be able to control who we are and what we do and where we go and how we live. And when we're not in control, it can lead to, in our lives, it can lead to frustration or anxiety or fear. And I think the pandemic that we are going through has exacerbated, it's highlighted that for many people in their lives, all that they thought they had, at least some control over, has gone. And decisions and choices and careers and life and relationships are no longer areas of their lives that they can control. But interestingly, control also always at one level battles with trust when we think about it.

And spiritually, it can be, there can be a relation between our desire for control and our ability to trust in God, because the two are sometimes mutually exclusive. The root of our challenge, sometimes in life, is our desire to be sinfully sovereign over our lives, to be in charge of our life.

That what I say matters more than what God says. And what I want to do is more important than what He wants me to do. Excuse me. And we know that in that area of our lives, as well as in other areas of life, control is challenged by relationship. Relationship challenges control, and particularly loving relationship challenges control. Because the moment we enter into loving relationships, they're messy. And they challenge our ability to be in control of everything, because we recognize and we see that there needs to be compromise in relationships and there needs to be trust. And sometimes that means we relinquish control.

And so in our lives spiritually and just generally, it's tremendously important to recognize that trust involves a different attitude towards control. And as Christians, that's one of our big challenges, isn't it? It's to enable or be enabled to trust God to do the right thing and to be in control, maybe especially at a time like this. And we're reminded of verse in Deuteronomy 29 and verse 29, where God sets out that there are things that are secret to us, that we can't control, that we don't know, that we will never find out, but that we are to trust Him in this. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do the works of the law. So there are things that we can know, there are things we can't control, and life is about entrusting ourselves as believers to the living God.

[5 : 16] Now, this passage goes right back to the very beginning of that issue in many ways. And I've entitled this sermon, Breaking Bad, and I'll explain why in a moment, because it's the account after God's good creation of where it all went wrong. Now, very often and historically and theologically, this chapter is referred to as the fall, and it's entitled that in our ESV.

Now, that title is not a biblical title. There is illusion to falling off at various points in the Bible, but it's not necessarily the most accurate description of what happened here.

It's more than just a stumble or a fall. It is much more about the breaking of a relationship, the breaking of a covenant with God, breaking of trust. That's ultimately what it is, and it is a bad breaking of trust, as we shall go on to see. And it's a difficult passage, and it's a difficult area in

many ways to understand, because what we have here are some really significant answers to humanity and to our spiritual condition and to our need, but we don't have all the answers, and we're left with many questions, even when we know this passage tremendously well. And part of the reason for that is because sin itself doesn't make sense. If you look at 1 John chapter 3 and verse 4, we're told there that everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness, because sin is lawlessness. And that word there for sin as lawlessness is the word that we get anomalous from. It's an anomaly. You know, it's acting against or without any real sense, or it's a distortion of love, and a distortion of reason, and it's a removal of relationship from its author. Sin is senseless.

It doesn't really have a reason behind it. And you think of today of violence and of greed and of pride and of selfishness and of hatred, it's senseless. It's senseless not to love. It's senseless to distort and to twist love and to wrench it from its author God. And there's no reason.

There's no reason here why Adam sinned. None. He was perfect. There was no defect. There was no trigger within him. There was no pressure. There was no threat. He was innocent. We're not given a reason. We're given this situation and what happened, but there's no reason behind what he chose to do. He chose, and he could have chosen, to trust God, to trust God to be in control, not to overstep the secure and perfect boundaries of their humanity. But he chose not to, and there's no reason that we know of, ultimately. And of course, the origin of evil itself within this context.

[9 : 07] We have no answer to that. We know that it is there, and we know that Satan fell from heaven, but we don't know how a perfect angelic being could have done that. So there's things that we don't know, things that we can't control and understand and have perfect knowledge of, but we recognize that sin itself is without reason and doesn't make sense. So in Genesis, we are reminded and particularly from what Thomas said last week, that humanity was created really good, perfect.

The entrance of sin and selfishness and evil is post-creation, and that's good, and that's important because we were not created evil. We were not created as sinners. Therefore, there's hope for change, and there's a recognition that this world in which we live is not how it was originally created to be in the presence of God. But we also know that we are helpless. We're helpless to change our hearts. We can't put it right. We can't be in control. We can't make things better, and we need to listen to God and entrust ourselves to His care. So what we have here is the chapter that speaks about the character of sin, and I hope that although it may seem very far away from our experience, the characteristics of sin are very evident still and very significant.

Now, sin itself, the word is, again, it's not mentioned in this passage, but undoubtedly its characteristics are revealed. And we do find here that sin is exposed to the degree that it reflects the damage between our relationship with God, our relationship between God and humanity.

So we come to this story, and we recognize and we know that evil is already present in the world. As a concept, it was at least known and understood, or maybe not understood, but known to Adam and Eve. They knew of the prohibition that God gave them, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so they knew that good and evil existed. And they also knew about death because that would be the reality if they did break God's command that they would die. So they knew about death and they knew about evil. And they were aware, presumably, that God was protecting them from that.

There was stuff that he didn't want them to know about evil and about death, and maybe even about Satan. We're not told whether they had a pre-existing knowledge of Satan, but they may well have had that there was angelic forces against God even at this point. But Satan certainly did exist by this point. And Revelation 20 and verse 2 speaks about this dragon, the ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. So there's always been this knowledge in biblical teaching of the serpent being Satan and being this angelic force and person who resisted the living God. And it's the story of his introduction of sin into the experience of humanity. And there's so much we could say about this, but we're just going to focus on one or two things in terms of the character of sin. The first is that he introduces deception into the world. Eve herself recognizes that and says in verse 13, then the Lord said to the woman, what is this you've done? And the woman said, the serpent deceived me and I ate. So deception was at the very core of sin and at the very core of the temptation that was meted out to Adam and Eve.

[13 : 47] And what did that look like? Well, I said there's three things that that deception looked like. In the first place, it introduced disorder into God's creation. Now, the serpent, verse 1, was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord had made. And he said to the woman,

now, there's disorder there. There's something weird happening.

Eve was aware of the reality of evil and of darkness and of something forbidden.

And she was aware of the punishment of death. And whatever is going on here, it seems to be very unnatural. There's a disorder happening here. There's something potentially dangerous happening here that maybe Eve shouldn't be inquisitive about or encourage or seek to control and have authority over because God made animals of a different order from humanity.

And they weren't, as we saw in chapter 1, they weren't suitable companions or chapter 2 for Adam. They weren't of the same, they weren't made in God's image. And they were simply a different reality from Adam and from Eve. And maybe potentially here was Eve dealing with a serpent, an animal, but who was conversing with her. And it was disordered, an animal with guile, with authority who knows about God. There's something wrong here. There's something against God's natural order. Should have, should have sounded alarm bells for her. So there's disorder.

But then the second thing about the deception is the original fake news that we find in verses 1-3 that as Satan speaks to Eve, he is immediately questioning truth and he's introducing what is the very first fake news into the universe. He's portraying a different truth and inverted commas about God. And what we recognize is it's an absolute character assassination of God. That Satan's great enemy is God here. And he wants to give the impression by asking questions, by insinuating certain things that God is harsh, he's defensive, he's oppressive, he's controlling, he's not letting Adam and Eve share in the universe fully as he should. He's introducing doubt into God's word, God's love, God's justice. He's appealing through that to her ambition.

[16:49] You know, Eve, why don't you decide what's good? Why can't you and Adam decide what's desirable? And what will make you wise? Why should God do that? You can do these things. Come on, sin.

It can't be that serious. And it's only another tree. Look at all the trees here. What makes this one so different? It's only a piece of fruit and it's for your freedom and for your wisdom. And what he's doing all the time is introducing fake news and challenging God's truth and God's reality to destroy God in her eyes and also to destroy the relationship between them and God.

For Satan, humanity has always been just collateral damage, because they're image-bearers of God. His real enemy is God. And it's God he wants to destroy.

And he's trying to get them to grab and control and be in charge of what or want things that God has already always promised them, fake news. And also, he does so with subtlety.

The deception is subtle, isn't it? He simply plants seeds of doubt. He asks questions. He deflects attention. He uses inquisitiveness. He makes sure God isn't walking with them in the garden at the time. He never reveals himself to Adam at all. He's just behind the scenes, so that he uses Eve to speak to Adam. Eve, Adam's beloved lover. And the guard would have been down with Adam when he was speaking to Eve. He wouldn't have sensed any alarm bells as she spoke with him.

[18:37] It was mediated temptation through someone who Adam loved that he brought this desperate temptation. So he introduces deception, disorder, fake news, and subtlety. And that reminds us of the world in which we live today. Not many things have changed. There is chaos and disorder as soon as entered into the universe in which we live. And we're always trying to control a world that is disordered and that should really sound alarm bells in our hearts and lives that something is desperately wrong.

We try to be in control, but it's like grasping the wind. And ultimately death is the great... It makes everything seem so senseless in our desire for control because it's the one thing that ultimately we have no control over. The world that we live in and our humanity, it seems like we're sweeping, sweeping leaves in a hurricane trying to control the chaos. It's not how it should be.

It should make us think. And we are deceived by our ability to be in charge and to be in control of the chaos. And it is also, is it not a world that is absolutely full of fake news, that is denying God's truth and has believed the lie about God, making up our own truth, making up our own ideas. I've used this illustration before to paraphrase G.K. Chesterton, when people stop believing in God, it's not that they believe in nothing, it's that they believe in anything. And so today people and the world in which we live in this city increasingly is believing in anything. There is no such thing as truth. And nothing is sacred at that level in terms of truth other than what we decide truth to be. What is real today? What's fake? It's harder and harder to tell the difference. Who are we as human beings? What is our gender? What is life?

What is love? You know, sin isn't so bad, and we're all ultimately good, and death is natural, and we can fix it. We're a universe of Bob the Builder's, we can all fix it. And yet God is denied in the reality of God, and His truth is often particularly the focus of venom in the world in which we live. But at the same time, it's subtle, isn't it?

Satan appears as an angel of light. He knows Scripture. He's super intelligent. He prefers the shadows. He's happy for us to mock His own existence, but He is an implacable hatred toward God. And anything, He will do anything and has done everything to stop us loving God, believing the truth, bowing to His God's sovereignty, and He will twist that every which way He can.

[22 : 03] Or He enables us to forget that God generously is willing to give us everything that sin wants to grasp and misses anyway.

So we see the character of sin here. I think we also see here the consequence of sin. Now, I'm not going to apply this to today's life. You can do that yourselves as you listen, because it's very simple. The applications remain the same. The consequence of sin is so destructive.

In verse 10, after they have eaten of this fruit, and God comes and calls to them and says, where are you? Adam says, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself. And then maybe if you go back to chapter 2, in verse 25, you have these words which are pertinent here, and the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. There was no shame. And that is replaced immediately as the relationship of trust is broken with God by them giving into the temptation. It's immediately replaced with fear and shame.

They weren't afraid of God before, but now there's fear and shame. You see, it's framed relationally, isn't it? And very powerfully relationally, with the focus being on their nakedness. And I think that's both symbolic and real.

In other words, sin has affected them physically, in their physicality, sexually, and also at a deeper relational level. There's hiding from their nakedness so that the perfect trust and the perfect honesty is gone. There's vulnerability, there's exposure, there's immediately some kind of self-centeredness that affects the way they look at each other.

[24 : 12] There's a need to hide at one level from each other and certainly hide from God and run from Him. So there's a deeper guilt, an instinctive guilt, and there was a fear and being afraid of God, which certainly wasn't there before, because they were now relating to Him differently as a judge, not as one who loved them and protected them and cared for them, but one who would expose their guilt. And there's a birth here. There's a brokenness and a death, but there's a birth of selfishness in all its consequences. And there's the very pathetic cover-up of fig leaves, both, I think, literally and metaphorically, a poor attempt to cover up for something much, much deeper and some much greater breaking of trust. So there's fear and shame, which we know about, and there's also blame, isn't there, in verses 12 and 13 that's fascinating. The man said, you know, the woman that you gave me to be with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate, and then the Lord said to the woman, what is this you have done? The most tragic question that was ever asked, what is this you've done? The woman said, the serpent deceived me and I ate, at least she recognizes that she was deceived. But there's blame, isn't there? There's blame.

They're blaming one another, they're blaming the serpent, and Adam blames God. You gave me this woman, it's your fault. There's immediate defensiveness. There's that immediate sense in which humanity says, I'm right, you're wrong, and it is always looking at others so that the basis of justice has moved from God to themselves, self-justification. And it doesn't matter who gets hurt in the blame, it can be each other, it can be the devil, or it can be God, anyone but me.

And you know, these characteristics, we still see, don't we, so strongly, fear and shame, blame, and the third thing is brokenness, is brokenness, isn't it? So that's, I'm saying, it's more than just a fall. It's the deep breaking of the covenant of trust between God and humanity.

The perfection of that is lost. This insatiable desire to be God's, to be in control, is embedded deep in the heart of sinful humanity, or of humanity that makes them become sinful humanity.

And it's not just the one relationship between Adam and God that is affected, but as a representative, the whole of humanity becomes part of this brokenness, the covenant breaking. In Romans 5, 12 to 14, it explains that representativeness of Adam. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sin, for sin indeed, was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there's no law.

[27 : 53] Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. And so we find the type between Adam and between Christ, which is another 10 and 20 and 100 sermons. But it's the death of life, isn't it? Now, Adam we know wasn't like us. On our behalf, he could have chosen not to sin.

Now, we can't do that. We have sinful natures from the beginning. And if he had chosen not to sin, whatever that would have meant for humanity, we don't know.

But we are like him in that even had we been there in his place at the beginning as a representative of humanity, we would have made the same choice to rebel. The brokenness would have happened. So very briefly and in conclusion, where do we go from here? Well, the rest of the Old Testament that we'll dip into as we move towards Christ, it helps us to see the outworking of sin and brokenness in the world. And it's something, as I've said, we see all around us, that fear, that shame, that guilt, that blame, and that brokenness, and that rebellion. And more than just the results of sin, naturally as it were, of the broken covenant, it's also the judgment of God as part of that, which we really haven't looked at at all in the second half of chapter 3.

The reality that God brings the results of a broken relationship into the world in which you live, into the universe, and into the relationships between man and woman and humanity, and between ourselves and God. We can never say sin is just not so bad.

So where do we go from here? What do we do with this reality when we think of our hearts and fear and shame and frustration and lack of control and our attitude to God and our thinking of truth?

[30 : 20] There's only one place that we can go, or there's only one word that I want to leave with you, and it's the word mercy. It's a great word in the Old Testament, loving kindness, mercy, loving kindness, love. It's described variously. It's God's willingness to break into our fallenness and our brokenness and our sin to provide the answer which we cannot provide ourselves. And we see it here, although we didn't read it towards the end of the verse, they'd used fig leaves to cover their nakedness, and in verse 21 we have this great verse, and the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them coverings. So the Lord reaches into their lives and He says, in many ways He says, own your own guilt. Yes, you're guilty. Yes, you need to be covered. I know that, and I'll cover. I'll provide the coverings. Don't hide the fact that you're guilty, and don't just try and cover it with your own fig leaves. I'll provide covering for you. I'll provide protection for you. And of course it points forward in different ways. It may be that this was, because it was an animal garment of skins, it may be reflective of the fact that God sacrificed animals on behalf pointing forward. But it also just points forward to another part of the Old

Testament, and sorry, that's me having to finish my sermon. In Exodus chapter 28 and verse 12, which speaks about the priests and the covering that the priests... It's the same word, the linen undergarments is the same words as the tunics is used here, and they were to wear that to cover their naked flesh. And then at the end of that verse it says that lest they bear guilt and die.

So there was a sense that the priesthood that God was ordaining in the Old Testament was to have this symbolic covering as well, to cover their nakedness and their sin and their guilt, lest they die.

And of course it was pointing forward to something much better, pointing forward to the promise or the promise that's spoken of here, which we also didn't read, is pointing forward to something better. And verse 15, in the judgment on Satan, I will put, eminently between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring, he shall bruise your head, you shall... and you shall bruise his heel. And that points forward to the seed of Eve, the seed of the woman who ultimately is the Lord Jesus Christ, the judgment on Satan, the destruction of Satan would be that Satan's head would be crushed by the Christ who would come.

And the Christ who would come went to the cross, and on the cross he was naked. And the cross he was lifted up, like the serpent from Moses, from the story of Moses, because the serpent on the cross is represented of sin and death that Jesus took on himself, our sin and our death that he took on himself on our behalf, and was raised so that we might live in his power, so that we are people who are also covered in his righteousness. Isaiah 61-10 speaks about that beautifully. He says, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exalt my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, the robe of righteousness. We are covered in his righteousness. Galatians 3, 27 also speaks about that, says we are baptized. As many of you, as we're baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. That is that we are covered in his righteousness. That's the covering that we need. That's the covering that he gives us. That enables us to have the Holy Spirit in our hearts so that we don't feel the need to control everything but to

trust the God who, for whom, who has given us everything, who is good and who is sovereign and who is king, that we don't need to be gods.

We trust in him and we know to trust in him in the good times and in the times that we don't understand and the times that are difficult. And when Satan whispers in our ear to say, he's not worth it, don't trust God, did he really say, does he love you? We banish these thoughts because we recognize and we know and we understand that there's no greater love than what God has shown as the sovereign King of kings, the Creator of the universe who in the person of his beloved Son was nailed to a cross and who faced Satan and destroyed him and his deceit and his lies, defeated him and his deceit and his lies and his deceit and who will one day destroy him completely.

[36 : 04] And we need to be on the side of God and of truth and recognize what his word, how it reveals this world and our need both cosmically but also much more significantly personally in our relationship with our Creator, which sin has broken and which only Christ can heal. Amen.

Lord God, we pray that you would teach us to understand you better, to understand what the truth of your word says and how it reveals the very genesis of, to use that word, the book is called very genesis of our need and the very beginnings of destruction that sin brought into the world, both at a cosmic level but also at a very personal individual level. May we recognize that the fundamental relationship that needs to be put right in our lives is our relationship with our Creator, which sin has broken and which leaves us under your judgment and under your just wrath unless we come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, to deal with the fear and the shame and the guilt and the brokenness. So help us to do that and may that transform our lives and transform how we are able to be doers of your word and not just hearers only and enable us to suffer well, to serve well and to speak well for Jesus. We ask it in His name. Amen.