

Life Answers In Genesis

What Went Wrong?

A Message for Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ

Sunday, October 13, 2019

Introduction

I heard a story about a successful businessman who reached the pinnacle of his career. He had it all:

- A gracious mansion on an estate secluded in a forest.
- A beautiful wife who was a model.
- Good friends.



To go along with his beautiful home, this man had a list of dream activities. One of them was to go big game hunting. After all his hard work, he wanted to have a whole month off - No Cell phones, no headaches. So, he sold his business for millions of dollars. He then bought a ticket and flew off to four weeks of adventure.

When he got home, the front gate to his estate was closed. He got out of the taxi and looked around. Sitting by the gate was his grounds keeper, looking very depressed.

So, the wealthy man asked, “Hey, what’s wrong?” The groundskeeper said, “Oh, I’m sorry – I’m feeling really sad about your dog. He died.”

“You mean, Max, my prize-winning Siberian husky is dead? He looked very healthy when I left – what happened?”

“Well, we’re not sure”, said the groundskeeper, “but we think he got into some rotten meat.”

“Since when do we leave rotten meat lying around?”

“Well, from the dead horse.”

“My thoroughbred racehorse died?”

“Oh, we tried to save him, but the flames from the barn were so hot, we just couldn’t get in. Then the roof caved in and it was all over.”

“My barn burned down. How did that happen?”

“Well, again, we’re not sure, but we think it was the sparks from the house.”

“The sparks from the house? You mean, my house was on fire?”

“Oh, yeah”, said the groundskeeper. “Someone knocked over a candlestick, and it got into the curtains, and before we knew it, the whole thing was a pile of smoking rubble.

“Who was using candles in the middle of Summer?”

“It was for your mother’s funeral.”

“My mother’s dead?”

“That’s right. When she heard how your wife ran off with your best friend, and how they cleaned out all your bank accounts, she just put her hand over her heart and keeled right over.”

The (previously) wealthy man reflected for a bit and said, “So, everyone I care about has either left me or is dead. Everything I own has been destroyed. All my riches are gone. I have nothing. Is there anything else I should to know about?”

The groundskeeper thought for a second. “Did I tell you your dog died?”

Now, this is an old story, but it’s not completely outlandish. One minute, a man has everything. The next, it’s all ashes.



For the last few weeks, we’ve been in in our series, “Life Answers in Genesis.” We’ve found that you can learn amazing answers to life’s questions by just opening the book of Genesis and reading the first few chapters. Here’s one question that stands out in life.

What went wrong?

We all like it when life goes well. But, why does life sometimes go wrong?
-In some cases, very wrong.

People are concerned about lots of things. You’ve all seen the lists. Here’s one from the Gallup Poll Organization:

- The Economy
- The government/Poor leadership
- Hatred/Violence/War

- Environment/Pollution
- Healthcare

(from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1675/most-important-problem.aspx>)

And once you understand what went wrong, a second question comes up.

How do we fix it?

What went wrong? How do we fix it? Here's an important point: Every religion and every world view must attempt to answer these questions. The way that the Bible answers them makes Christianity unique in all the world. We are unlike any other religion or world view. We've looked at different reasons for that in our series. Today, we'll learn more.

As we've opened the book of Genesis, we've seen God creating everything: The heavens and the earth, and all the living things on the earth. Then, God creates Humans, Adam and Eve, and places them in a beautiful garden.

Everything was perfect. Today though, things don't look so perfect.

So, let's begin.

I. What went wrong?

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman... (Genesis 3:1)

What's going on here? First, the first humans, Adam and Eve, were confronted with a new voice. This particular voice is called the "serpent". The Bible scholars in the room know that he's later referred to with names like the Devil and Satan. Two sessions from now, we'll spend some time looking at the Devil in detail. For now, we'll lump him into a pile with what I've been calling the "other voices". To see why I'm doing this, let's quickly review some things we've learned by opening the Bible and reading in Genesis.

We've learned:

- God is First.
- Since God is first, then his values are first.
 - His values should displace our values.
- God expresses his values (among other ways) with words.
- His most important words are recorded in the Bible.

Let's look at what's happening in Genesis 3 with this in mind. We have this new voice, the Serpent, the Devil. He has some bad intentions - He wants to cause problems. How does he do this? ***He does this by striking up a conversation with the first humans.***

Let's read that verse again.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. ***He said to the woman,***

Here's a very important principle:

- God expresses his values with words.
- The other voices express their values with words.
 - *That is their greatest power.*
 - *Their power isn't in magic or supernatural abilities.*
 - *The power of the other voices is **their words.***

Knowing this, let's see what the Serpent has to say. What are his words? Let's look at the second half of Genesis 3:1.

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'? (Genesis 3:1 b)

Look especially at the first 4 words: "Did God really say..."

Why did he start that way? We don't know for certain but let me suggest two possibilities. First, the Serpent could be saying that God doesn't have

the ability to get his words across accurately. In this case, he's saying something like, "perhaps those aren't the words God spoke. How can you be sure?"

That's certainly a challenge we often hear today about God's word, the Bible. For example, the Bible was written long ago. We get our copies today because lots of people copied the words by hand. Some would suggest that the copiers got it wrong. Maybe they got it wrong a lot.

Well, we have abundant evidence that the copiers got it right. We have copies of the Scriptures from centuries ago. A few weeks back we spoke about the Dead Sea scrolls, a collection of such ancient writings. When we compare the ancient copies to our current copies, they match with an extremely high level of accuracy. So, the idea that we aren't reading the original words is a bad challenge. However, the challenge has existed from the days of the Garden, so it's not surprising that it never seems to go away, no matter how much evidence we collect that proves it wrong.

The second possibility for the Devil's choice of these words could be a challenge as to whether the words of God are **reasonable**. Reading Genesis 3:1 once again, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" In this case, the Serpent is saying, "Wow! Look at all this wonderful food - Is God saying you can't eat any of it?"

Understand what the Devil is suggesting there. *He's suggesting that God is unreasonable.* If God created a beautiful garden full of wonderful food and told Adam and Eve they weren't allowed to eat any of it, that might appear to be odd. But, what did he really say?

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

So, it turns out that God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to eat anything they wanted from the garden - Except from the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil. God warned Adam that they were not to eat from that tree, or they would die.

Let's be clear about something here. The Devil was lying. Here's what Jesus says about him:

...When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (b)

Let's hold onto that - We'll get back to it in a moment. How does Eve react to this? Let's read on in Genesis 3.

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Genesis 3:2-3)

So, Eve starts off well. She tells the Devil that yes, God has allowed them to eat from any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But she gets one thing wrong. She adds something to the clear words of God. God said don't eat from the tree of good and evil. Eve said, "don't eat, **and don't touch.**" That's not what God said.

We spoke a few sessions back about the importance of God's word. In that session, we learned that we need to listen to it. *And, we need to remember it.* For fear of giving out the ending, let's say this story doesn't end well for Eve. She listened to God's word, *but she didn't do well on the remembering part.* This is a whole sermon, so for now, let's just say that adding to the clear Word of God doesn't help us to face temptation.

The Serpent continues the conversation. How does he react to Eve?

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Before we get into what the serpent said, let's talk about what he didn't say. He didn't say, "Oh, I'm sorry – I guess I was wrong about that. Why, I guess that God **does** accurately share his words."

This is how the Devil works. He tells lies. When his lies are exposed, he doesn't admit anything. He just moves on to other lies. That leaves lots of lies hanging around.

That's exactly what he does here. He tells another lie. In this case, God has used words to warn about danger. Eating from the wrong tree leads to death. *The Devil uses words in order to challenge God's words.* He says, "not going to happen."

Now, why would he tell this lie? Previously, he suggested that God didn't have the ability to accurately share his thoughts. He suggested that God was unreasonable. So, he used words to create doubt. He wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God's words. But, that wasn't enough. Now, he wants Adam and Eve to doubt God's **power**. God said something was going to happen. The Devil says it won't. He's suggesting God doesn't have the power to act on his words.

But even that's not enough for the Devil. There is one more temptation. Satan uses his words, his lies, to tempt Adam and Eve to doubt **God's character**. He says, "Hey, Adam and Eve – God's holding back on you. "If you eat that fruit, something wonderful will happen. *You'll be like God.*" "God", the Devil says, "doesn't want that. He obviously doesn't have your best interest in mind."

And this was the temptation that led to Adam and Eve falling to the temptations of the Devil. I've spoken about this at other times, and I've called these temptations the three doubts of the enemy.

- Doubt God's Word.
- Doubt God's Power
- Doubt God's Character.

The Devil and the world have been using these as the basis of temptation for centuries. We can meet the three doubts by remembering the five sentences we've been discussing in our series.

- God is First.
- God is in control.
- God knows what he's doing.
- God is good.
- God cherishes me.

One way of looking at the temptation of Adam and Eve is to say that the Devil used words to make them doubt God's word and his power. In other words, the Devil is saying, "God doesn't know what he's doing, and he isn't in control". When he used his words to make Adam and Eve doubt God's character, he was saying, "God doesn't cherish you, and God isn't good." Because they believed the lies of the Devil, the other voice, they stopped putting God first. They put themselves first. They tried to be God.

Section Summary

So, now we know what went wrong. God created a perfect world and gave it to us. Another voice came along. The voice told lies to Adam and Eve that made them doubt God. So, they put themselves first instead of God. This has led to a broken world, full of all the misery that humans have faced ever since the garden. This is how we have beautiful things one minute and ruins the next.

So, how do we go about fixing this?

II. How do we fix it?

Well, we need to do all the things we've been talking about so far in our series:

- We need to put God First.
 - Note: He's first, whether we think so or not.
- We need to put God's values first.
- We need to remind ourselves that God shares his values with words, and his most important words are found in the Bible.
 - This is hard, because we are surrounded by other voices - Voices that lie to us and tempt us.

These are the high-level goals. Let's talk about some steps to help us along the way. Something helpful is to know about the **wrong ways** of fixing things that humans have attempted. Let's learn about those by reading on in Genesis 3

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Adam and Eve lost faith in God and his Word. So, what did they rely on to make decisions? *They used their senses and her emotions.* They saw that the tree was good for food. We don't know how they determined that. Maybe the tree looked like other trees? Maybe its fruit looked like other fruit? We don't know.

What we do know is, the tree was pleasing to the eye - It was pretty. It made you feel good. There's a saying from the 1960's: If it feels good, do it. I think that saying has been around in one form or another since the garden.

So, without God's word, the first humans were left only with their senses and their emotions. Here's an important point:

***Humans need God's word because we do not have any ability to sense ultimate reality on our own.
-We never have, and we never will.***

So, the wrong way to fix the problems of our world is to trust in our senses and our emotions alone. The right way is to trust God's Word.

To learn a second bad way of dealing with the problems of the world, let's read one more verse in Genesis 3.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Adam and Eve totally underestimated the size of the problem they had created. They thought there was some easy solution. Just grab some leaves off a tree, sew them together, and voila! We don't have time to finish the story today, but this doesn't work. What does?

We get a hint down in verse 21:

21 The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

So, Adam and Eve thought, "Not a big deal. Grab some leaves". God said, "no". Adam and Eve were unable to fix the problem. God had to do it. God had to supply the solution. He had to make the clothes to cover them out of animal skins. We learn something from this: ***When people sin, something must die.*** Plants don't have to die to give their leaves. Animals, on the other hand, *must* die to give up their skins. So, the wrong way to fix the problem is to *assume we can fix the problem on our own*. The right way is to realize that God must provide the solution.

This is what makes Christianity different than any other religion. Other religions believe that there is something wrong with the world, too. But the answer is human effort. Perform enough religious activities: Pray enough, fast enough, study enough, concentrate enough, work enough, and we will fix our world. For those who don't believe in God, it's study enough and

work enough. But all the world views and religions of the world have this in common: *Everything is ultimately addressed through human effort.*

The world views problems individually.

- The world says the problem is war and violence, so we only need to find better diplomats.
- The world says the problem is the economy, so we only need to find better economists.
- The world says the problem is the environment, so we just need to come up with better regulations to stop polluting.

Now, diplomacy, the study of economics, laws, and other ways of addressing problems aren't wrong in themselves. But the Bible teaches that all problems are ultimately related so sin and to corrupt human hearts. Imagine a world where people don't want to fight. Imagine a world where everyone is fair. Imagine a world where people don't dump pollutants on their neighbors. Imagine that this is all voluntary and natural. That's what the world would look like if all human hearts were good. What we see is the result of fallen hearts. That's what needs to be addressed more than anything else.

There is much more to talk about concerning the solution to the world's problems. We'll talk more about this in our next session. For now, let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

What went wrong with our world? The Bible teaches that humans were given a perfect world. God spoke to us using words, but we listened to the 'other voices'. We believed those voices instead of God. Because of this, our perfect world was broken.

How do we fix this? Everything we've been talking about in our series. We need to put God and his word first. We discussed a few things to help, but

the biggest of those is realizing that we can't do this on our own. We need God to help us.

We read that, when Adam and Eve fell, they tried to cover their sin with leaves. God provided animal skins instead. We believe that the sacrifice of animals to cover sin was a symbol. In order to cover the sins of Adam and Eve, and the rest of humanity, we need a much greater sacrifice.

That sacrifice came through Jesus Christ. Where there is sin, something must die. Jesus died for us. Fixing the problems of the world starts with Jesus. It starts when we accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.



Let's close with some words of hope. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John looks forward to a time when God will fix our broken world. All those who have followed Christ will be there.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:3-4)

If we follow Jesus, we can be confident that one day, every imaginable problem will be fixed. And none of the fixes will be temporary. On that day, everything will be fixed forever.