

GENESIS 3:1-13
IT ALL GOES WRONG!

What is the best thing about the world we live in? There will be all kinds of answers to that question, depending. Recently I asked someone what is the best thing about Juniper Green and without thinking, instantly, he said 'the people'. That might be your answer too, or you might think of something else as the best thing about the world. What is the worst thing about the world we live in? Again, there will be a whole host of answers to that question; slightly flippantly, but the answer from the same person to the one thing Juniper Green needs most, was better car parking! The answer to the worst, might be the same; the people, when we see what people are capable of. I'm not sure that would be the worst thing about the world, but it does show that the world we live in is a huge mix of good and bad, of things that we enjoy and celebrate and other things that leave us feeling hurt, sad, angry. Our world is at one and the same time a glorious place to be and a place where we're left to mourn its wickedness. The world is a place where can see the great variety of birds and animals and plants, sea and sun, yet this is the same world in which these things are all at risk from oil pollution in the Gulf of Mexico!

This world came about through a choice that someone once made. This is the Bible's view of the world. We are made to make choices. People always have had the capacity to make choices; that's part of our bearing God's image. We can choose to take A rather than B; to turn right rather than left; to choose a blue car rather than a red car. More seriously, we also have the capacity to choose right from wrong, good from bad, to give or steal, to love or kill. There are two things that we often forget about choices: first of all, we are responsible for them and can't pass that on to someone else; the person who writes graffiti all over walls has chosen to do that and can't really blame their environment for forcing them into it! Secondly, choices have consequences, either for good or ill and we sometimes forget that till we are made to face up to them! The person who spray paints graffiti on the fence in Baberton Crescent defaces someone else's property, makes them angry, means they have to clean it up and may result in some kind of penalty if the police find out who did it! Choices have consequences!

It all began so well for the world. We have seen that the world was great and glorious place; God created everything and it was very good. The man of faith looks at the world in all its glory and splendour and praises God who created it. People are created bearing the image of God, with the capacity to love and be loved, to make choices, to love God. Adam and Eve live in Eden, the garden of delight and Adam the estate manager works to look after the garden and use it freely and look after it responsibly. They are free and happy to love one another too and everything is just perfect. This is world that God made and it was very good! But, even in this perfect world there are boundaries set: "*And the...*" (2:16f) Adam has the God-given freedom to be at home in Eden, but there is a boundary; he is to live within that boundary and no further. Everything is fine and good.

But then... "*Now the...*" (3:1) Eve is enticed; the fallen angel in the guise of the serpent entices Eve; the seed of doubt planted in her mind and not really because she likes apples; actually the Bible doesn't tell us it was an apple, just fruit! Eve knows the boundaries: "*We may...*" (3:2f) – these were God's words to Adam, but the serpent is wily: "*You will...*" (3:4f) She is enticed by the thought of being like God, perhaps; "*When the...*" (3:6f) You have a choice to make: eat or not eat? Respect the God-given boundaries and obey Him or not? What will you do? As we know, Eve and Adam chose to eat the fruit, they chose to listen to the serpent as the embodiment in the story of the power of evil in the world, the devil, and gave in to his temptations.

These are the very clever devices he has: to cast doubt on what God has said: “you won’t die; in fact you’ll be even greater and better than are now!” There is nothing magical about the fruit they ate; this is all about making choices and their consequences! That wrong choice, that rebellion against the boundaries – the Bible calls this ‘sin’. Here sin enters into God’s good world by the choices His people made; evil and wickedness came into the world, entered Eden that day!

Simply, everything was spoiled.

- **Their view of themselves:** “*Then the...*” (3:7) They had been at ease with their own bodies, but now they are ashamed and so made aprons to cover their nakedness. So entered into the world a sense of unease with themselves and along with that feelings of being worthless and hopeless. We are wonderfully made, unique, special, but we can also loathe ourselves and consider ourselves worthless; the good is spoiled. The image of God is spoiled; we now choose bad things as well as good.
- **Life** – in Eden, life was perfect; there is nothing to spoil life; we must think that Adam and Eve would have lived forever in Eden had nothing happened to spoil that. God said that if they ate of the tree “*you will...*” (2:17) The devil countered that: “You will not die” but God was right; from that moment, death entered the human world and while they did not die at once and suddenly, from that moment onwards they began to die. People don’t die because they have done something wrong, but death came into world as result of sin.
- **Their relationships with one another** – we’ve already said that they were ashamed and hid their nakedness from one another. Blame enters their relationship: “*the woman...*” (3:12) and it becomes a relationship of male dominance and female subservience, a relationship where sex becomes a way of exercising power over someone rather than expression of love; lust replaced love; selfishness replaced care and concern for someone else.
- **Their relationship with God** – the centre of whole thing is the fact that the relationship with God is spoiled. We have this picture of God coming into the garden in the evening, as has been His habit, to talk to Adam and Eve, to pass the time of day with them, a beautiful picture of companionship between God and His people. Now when God comes, they are hiding: “*Where are...*” (3:9) Now this relationship is marked not by love and companionship, but marked by fear, shame, guilt, spoiled because they made a wrong choice, they had stepped over the boundary. The day on which Adam and Eve did this was the day they died spiritually; their relationship with God died and what had been blessing before became curse.
- **Their relationship with the world** – work was a creative joy in Eden; now it will be trouble and toil: “*Cursed...*” (3:17ff) Bearing children, a part of the loving relationship of man and woman together, will become something of great pain for the woman. The world that had been given to people to enjoy will now be source of struggle and danger!
- **Paradise lost** – “*So the...*” (3:23) Simply the man is no longer welcome in garden, but is banished forever, now they are separated from God and prevented from coming back; they are kept out, alienated.

This is the Bible’s view of the world we live in, a place created by God and with all sorts of good things, but also a broken place where there is much that causes us pain and grief. This broken world is a result of wrong choices; the choices Adam and Eve made are presented as having the most profound and painful consequences for the whole world and for all time. This is the way in which the Bible would have us understand our world. It is the way it is because of these wrong choices! Sin and wickedness entered the human world that day. I have to say that this is not just Eden’s wrong choices, but we still make wrong choices that affect our world. We exploit the world we live in carelessly, with no thought for the future of the planet; we exploit other people, sometimes in unspeakable ways for personal gain or pleasure;

we continue to rebel against God and push back the boundaries of good behaviour. The choices we make all have consequences whether we realise it or not.

We are responsible for these choices. It is fascinating to see how God forces Adam to face up to that responsibility: *"Where are you?"* God knew fine where Adam was; He knew fine that Adam was hiding; He knew fine why. But He still asked question of Adam so that Adam was forced to acknowledge what he had done: *"I heard..."* (3:10) Our environment doesn't make us choose badly; our parents are not to blame for the wrong choices we make; we make choices and we are responsible for them and we have to acknowledge that. The Bible calls this repentance, as we take responsibility before God for our wrong choices and our mistakes and ask for forgiveness. We try to shift the blame: once, something had happened in our house when children were small and the three of them simply blamed another and it went round in a circle with each blaming the next one! Who teaches children to do that? No-one; it is an instinct we have because sin lives in us. We can't shift the blame, but simply acknowledge that we have some measure of responsibility for the broken world we live in by the wrong choices we have made.

The glory of the gospel is that God has gone to work to undo and reverse all of these. Everything that was spoiled in Eden, God has begun to reverse in Christ. We don't have time to go into this in detail, but that's the whole point Paul makes in Romans 5: *"Just as..."* (5:18) We see ourselves as people loved by God; forgiveness comes from God; we are reconciled with God, again His friend and no longer His enemy, at home and no longer alienated, paradise is regained; we are reconciled with one another, and loving relationships are reclaimed; there will be a day when the whole world will be healed, a day when there will be no more pain and death and suffering and tears; this is our hope and the promise of God in Christ. The gospel tells us that God has begun to heal this broken world of ours and did it with coming of His Son, when His Son died and was raised. God will again bless world because of Jesus.

Everything was so good! Then it all went wrong. Adam and Eve made a bad choice; they stepped over the boundary; their choice had consequences. This is our broken world, a world where people are capable of great good, but also unspeakable things; a world in which we make choices every day, big choices and trivial; good and bad; right and wrong. We need to understand: this is the world we live in from the Bible's point of view. We need to make good choices, as much as possible. We need to take responsibility for our part in it and ask God for forgiveness for our wrong choices. Jesus told a story of young man who rebelled against his father, went off on his own, was lost in his own sense of alienation, but came back and found his father waiting for him to love him all over again. This is also our story, and the story of our world; God is still waiting, welcoming, loving us as we come home to Him by faith in Jesus Christ.