The mystery of iniquity

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[0:00] Let us turn this morning to that chapter in which we read, Genesis chapter 3. And we are really concerned today with the first five or six verses of this chapter as we continue our studies in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 3 strikes the first sad note in God's revelation to man.
Until now, the events and circumstances and history pictured out for us in the opening chapters of Revelation have had written over them that, Word of God, it is all very good.
And then we come to Genesis 3. And the picture is a very different one. Genesis 3 has been called the saddest chapter in the whole of the Bible.
The most tragic chapter. And certainly it brings in a darkness and a shadow where there had been nothing but light and blessing.
[1:34] And Genesis 3 is also perhaps one of the basic and most important chapters in the whole of the Bible.

It has been said often of Genesis that it's the seed plot of the entire revelation of God to man.
And in a special sense this is true of Genesis 3. Because in Genesis 3 we find the foundation upon which all the major doctrines of the Christian faith are based, on which they stand.
Many streams in the whole book of Revelation trace back to this one fountain of the third chapter of Genesis.
In the third chapter of Genesis we have, of course, God's explanation to us of the present fallen on sinful condition of man.
[2:57] Erase Genesis chapter 3 from your Bible and we have absolutely no explanation at all for the kind of people we are or the kind of world that we live in.

But furthermore take Genesis 3 out of the Bible and you can immediately take away most of the doctrines that characterize the Christian faith.
Take away the reality of the events spoken of here and the incarnation of the Son of God becomes an inexplicable mystery.
His death on the cross becomes almost a blasphemy. Take away this chapter of Genesis 3 and to understand the nature of man or to interpret the still sad music of humanity becomes an impossibility.
Genesis 3 Genesis 3 gives us God's explanation of why things are as they are in the world in which we live.
[4:20] And it is emphatic that although things are as they are they were not always as they are.
Once as we've been seeing over recent Sunday mornings once all was well in the creation which God made.

All was good and then things went wrong. Interestingly the first word in this third chapter of Genesis in the Hebrew is the serpent.
And that significant word in the very forefront is explanatory of all that Genesis 3 goes on to tell us.
The serpent. The serpent a beast who became a vehicle for the use of Satan.
A vehicle by which the power of evil and the malignancy of sin began to work on the man that God had made in his own image.
[5:45] Genesis 3 doesn't altogether give us that explanation that the serpent was merely a vehicle used by another and an evil power but later scripture goes on to interpret that fact in that way.

We'll look at that later on in our sermons in Genesis 3. Ezekiel and Isaiah in the Old Testament tell us that the approach to man was not merely the approach of the serpent but the serpent possessed by Satan.

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They tell Ezekiel and Isaiah tell us who and what Satan is. The New Testament scriptures confirm that Satan was the one through whom man was tempted and man fell.
man was the man was the man was the man was the fall of man from a fairly wide panoramic view. man the fall man falling away from his original state his ceasing to have real spiritual life in him and his separation from God because of his disobedience all this we call the fall.
[7:22] and the fall itself and an understanding of the fall is vital and important for us in understanding all the rest of man's need and God's provision for man's need in Christ.

For one thing the fact that man is a fallen creature is a refutation it refutes the hypothesis that is so generally accepted today about man.
That hypothesis is not very frequently given a critical examination by people but it is largely accepted by many and the hypothesis the theory built on it is just this that man is on a nut worth climb that he is morally and spiritually on a nutward evolutionary spiral from the lesser to the greater and that given the right circumstances man will evolve into a very fine creature.
that kind of theory has been in vogue for a long time. It's not a new one but it has seeped into the general thinking of almost every passion in the western world today.
The whole of western society acts and believes acts on this belief and accepts the belief. Most of the politics of our land are geared into this and most of the work that's been done on a social level accepts this as a basic fundamental truth about man that man is on an upward spiral.
[9:35] He's getting better and better intellectually and morally. What is this kind of idea? Well, our bible would tell us that really it's a false optimism and it carries a terrific danger in it because it's the optimism of a false a totally false and shallow understanding of what man is in his basic nature.

The bible says and Genesis 3 teaches us this that instead of man ascending from a lower to a higher state of being it tells us that the very opposite is true.
It tells us that man is not on a climb up he has fallen down. It tells us that in the world this truth must always be written that all has sinned and come short of the glory of God.
It tells us that man is not living according to the original intention and the original pattern of God's dealing with him.
He is a fallen creature. and it is still true that as long as that factor is neglected by the preachers of our land and the politicians of our land and the psychologists and the sociologists and all the other is and us that we have that man's condition will not improve.
[11:34] Sociologists for example tell us that if you correct two basic things that are wrong with men then all will be well with them.

Two basic factors that say are responsible for all the ills to which man is so evidently subject. And these two things they tell us are these heredity and environment.
Take the second of these and for the last hundred years or so men everywhere have been telling us that if you improve the environment of man then man will be a better creature.
Give him better wages better working conditions better clothes better houses families and better towns to live in and man's troubles and ills will begin to disappear.
and once you have improved his environment and man is becoming a better creature then naturally you're going to improve his hereditary and his children will be a lot better than the father has been.
[12:48] Well we've been waiting for more than a hundred years and we still don't see very much success attaching to all the effort that has gone into changing these two basic factors man's environment and man's heredity and of course our chapter tells us that that kind of approach is totally false it tells us that man began in the best possible environment he could eat of all the trees of the garden everything that man needed to help them be an obedient creature man in Eden had all the advantages that he needed in his outward environment and all the propensities of his nature an unfallen sinless nature all the propensities of his nature were also factors which should have helped him to fulfil the purpose for which

God had created him to glorify and enjoy God Genesis 3 tells us about how false these optimistic views of man's nature and man's condition are and must be it doesn't matter how good you make man's environment it will never be as good of the environment in which man was first given being doesn't matter how you tampered with the stream of heredity you just cannot get to the place where Adam was because he had no sinful ancestry behind him there was no fallen nature in him one would have thought that the history unfolded in this present century would have made all abandon that kind of approach to the problems that beset man true world wars should have demonstrated

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how bestial and how fallen and how sinful man is but it hasn't done that two world wars have failed to make man face up to what man is and our nation is still proceeding
I believe to deal with man and man's problems from a totally false base and how then can we expect anything other than the kind of chaos that we see around us law and order disappear give the chaos a new home and he'll be a chaos still he'll still be a tinker take a murderer and put him in the best kind of environment you have and do all you can with him and until you change his heart and his nature he'll still be a murderer or in other words a sinner will still be a sinner until God deals with him in grace and in mercy what man needs is not a new environment the Bible says but a new heart and this is what is provided for us in the gospel of Christ and today by and large all the approach within our own nation and within the structures that we live by today this is the one factor that is being neglected it's the one factor that is smeared at so we needn't wonder at the mess that we tend to be in in our society and in our nation today the breakdown of a social structure that was built upon the basis of belief in the
Bible's teaching and that breakdown is evident in a myriad ways all around us and we believe that far from being better than the structure that was built upon the word of God it is going to be a chaotic unworkable structure until we return to the word of God here then is man in a perfect environment environment but here is something else here is a power working on human nature from without working in a perfect unfallen sinless nature and it is the power of the mystery of iniquity as Paul calls it in Thessalonians the mystery of iniquity worketh until now says the apostle and here is the first glimpse of the mystery of iniquity at work with man now the serpent the serpent now was more clever says
Genesis for that's the word clever rather than subtle subtle today has the meaning for us of a kind of an evil genius but there's no sense of that I believe in the original Hebrew but it's just the acute wisdom and cleverness of the power of evil Satan because we believe that although it's a serpent that is mentioned here we must all the time remember that the serpent is only being used as a vehicle by Satan more clever than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made and later on scriptures later on tell us that Satan himself was not only a creature of God but was one of the brightest of God's creatures
[19:12] Lucifer the son of the morning perhaps the head of all the angels and archangels and there was through him an entry of sin and evil and ungodliness into the creation that God had made he it would seem begun to want the throne of God himself the New Testament tells us that pride allied with envy was the sin through which Satan fell and what the results of that fall meant for him and for many other angels who fell with him we can scarcely understand it meant that there arose in them a malignant and awful set attitude against their creator and their

God and now Satan approaches unfallen man and the way the method that Satan uses here is basically the method of all temptation still this is why Genesis 3 I think rings a bell with every one of us when we read it because we are reading of things that touch our own experience and when we go through the patterns of what Satan did with Adam and Eve then we see that these patterns have been recurring not just through human history but recurring again and again in our own personal experience human experience testifies to the truth of this history see how
Satan approaches he didn't go to Adam he went to Eve not to the man but to the woman I better not overstress the significance that is there but I believe there is a significance the covenant was made with Adam not with Eve and Satan does not first of all approach Adam he approaches Eve and gets at Adam through Eve and then the beginning of his approach is very clever too he doesn't come up to Eve and make himself known as an evil power he never does that instead he comes up and he presents himself as a very pious religious creature where does he begin he begins talking to
Eve about God he wants to impress upon Eve that he is just as pious as she is so he talks about God talks about the God who looms so large in the human life of Eden and he he he he you know he takes the best possible kind of approach he has God said he's got a question he's talking about God but he's talking about God has a question in it and really what he's saying to her is this now I want to talk to you and I want to have religious talk with you I want to talk to you about a theological subject I've got a theological question in my mind and I want to discuss it with you let's enter into theological dialogue so you see he's taking her on very safe ground she must think why should she be alarmed about talk about
God what religious person would be alarmed about talking about religion what theologian would not want to talk theology who would not want to have dialogue about the things that matter most when

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that opportunity is offered to her now you see he doesn't approach and sort of say anything that will make her arm herself or that will alert her to any kind of danger the approach is this kind of approach now today children we're going to talk about religion and it's all going to be alright and I want you to settle back and relax because we're going to have a profitable hour of dialogue this is very often the way temptation and dangerous thought begins
[25:01] Satan inspires confidence he does not in any way want Eve to think he's a blackguard that she must watch he inspires confidence he begins talking about God he begins by asking this very simple question has God said well he starts off his discussion and he goes on with his question and it has to do with the one prohibition that God had laid in the life of this man and this woman God had said that there was one tree of which they would not eat now that one command that one prohibition had established for Adam and Eve the sphere of the relationship with God they were the creatures who must obey the creator

God was in this one prohibition showing that he looked for obedience to his will or he was showing that man had been created to live in the sphere of fellowship with God and in obedience to God as God that was I think what the prohibition meant at one level it was also a test for bringing out moral character for morality is obedience to God or disobedience to God man had been made with a free will he had been made with the ability to have fellowship with God and to worship God he had been made a moral personal creature people ask why God should have created man in such a way as he could fall well
I dare say there's much that we will never understand about that but if man was to be a rational and a free and a real moral creature then we can believe that the possibility of his doing not only good but of his doing evil also had to be there otherwise his obedience to God would have been a mechanical thing and Satan as soon as he approaches Eve touches on the one prohibition he emphasises that and makes it stand out in her eyes ye hark God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden now you see he's taken a truth of God but already he has twisted it into an untruth Satan always does that God didn't say you've not to eat of every tree of the garden in fact
God had said the very opposite God had said of all the trees in the garden you may eat God had said you can eat of every tree but this one now Satan was still you see he was centering in focusing in on the prohibition but his approach to it was such as to make the prohibition look far more important than the permission the permission to eat all the other trees had been given to man the prohibition wasn't only one but Satan emphasizes the prohibition can you not eat of every tree of the garden and the woman answered and she said we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden but of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said you shall not eat of it neither shall he touch it lest he die and we see in her answer that already
Satan had won a lot of ground the fall was beginning Eve had listened to the insinuation of Satan against God and she had accepted Satan's approach to the whole matter she said yes this is the way it is we can eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden that was almost a defense of God but then she isolated the prohibition but the fruit of the tea which is in the midst of the garden God has said ye shall not eat of it neither shall ye touch it but God hadn't said that God had laid no prohibition around the touching of it so Satan has already at this stage gained this ground in Eve's heart he has made God look an unfair God in her eyes and she is already misjudging what God has done she is already adding to the prohibition and the prohibition is finding in earth some sense of unfairness about it and then you see having one background
[30:52] Satan comes in very quickly and says surely he won't die now he is challenging the word of God and this is what Satan does in all his dealings with us he challenges the truth of what God has said take the attitude of the average man to the Bible today and you'll see how largely Satan has succeeded in our generation in taking away trust and confidence in the word of God now of course there's a on the human level there's a whole history behind that unbelieving scholarship unbelieving theology and philosophy has eventually seeded out until the man in the street no longer believes that the Bible is the word of God it's now the very reverse it is the specialist and the scholar who is coming more and more back to the place where the

Bible has to be accepted as an authoritative revelation from God you meet a taxi driver I've not too long ago met a taxi driver who scorned the idea that the Bible could have any message from God and when I queried him on just a few basic factors he couldn't give me any answers to them he had absolutely no clue where the Bible came from or how it had arisen or why it had been kept by men as a special religious book for thousands of years and it turned out that he had never read his Bible

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he had not a clue what it was about but he had written it off and that taxi driver is just symptomatic of hundreds of thousands of people millions perhaps in Great Britain today here is the result I believe of the working of Satan the mystery of iniquity challenging the truth of God's word you shall not surely die God won't let you die surely and then he goes on to give reason why this threat would never be carried out for God knows that in the day you eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as God's knowing good and evil now he is challenging
God quite openly challenging God with untruth and with injustice he is saying to Eve God's wanting to keep you in darkness and in ignorance knowledge is a good thing what kind of God have you got if he's wanting to keep you from getting knowledge and of course that's a very common argument still today men make excuses about what they do because they want to gain knowledge by experience and some will go as far as to tell us that all knowledge is good the Bible says no Genesis 3 tells us that all knowledge is not good Genesis 3 tells us that some knowledge will be to the detriment of the human spirit and the human soul for all eternity and Eve was on the brink of acquiring knowledge that was going to destroy her and destroy the race that was to come from her spiritually they are not very simple lesson that all knowledge is not good some knowledge men are far better without but you see he already had made large inroads of this tempted into Eve's heart and
Eve's standing and Eve's position and he had her looking at the tree and she saw and she desired and she took and then she gave the fall is based upon the work of Satan the mystery of iniquity at work with the creature that God had made temptation following or laying down patterns that will be found in almost every temptation interesting exercise for you I don't think that I'll do it for you but you take this temptation and compare it for example with the temptation of Christ or compare it with what the New Testament is that John says about temptation being centered in three things the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life
Eve looked and she saw the tree that it was good for food the lust of the flesh she saw that it was a tree to be desired the lust of the eye and she saw that it was a tree that would make one wise the pride of life and basically these three things are three avenues of the approach of evil to us always it's still the basic principles by which Satan tempts and overcomes and constrains us to sin the particular details will vary but the principles and the intention and the malignancy of evil is always the same a sad story is Genesis 3 but Genesis 3 goes on to a brighter side as well because although
[36:55] Satan was at work God was also at work and we shall see that in other sermons from this chapter that where sin abounds yes even Genesis 3 teaches us this that where sin abounds blessed be God grace does much more abound let us pray our gracious God we bow before the mystery of thy being and of thy holiness and we are humbled before the mystery of our own being and our sin and our fallenness and we thank thee for thy word which brings light into what would otherwise be a totally dark enigmatic situation for us we mourn oh lord because we are part of that race which lost so much in its sin against thee and our own hearts and our own daily experience testifies to the truth of original sin and fallen nature and we ourselves have to condemn our own hearts and our own thoughts and our own actions as being ungodly in their root and in their fruit we thank thee oh god that this is not the only message of thy word we thank thee for the message of grace and of mercy and of restoring and renewing power through our

Lord Jesus Christ and we pray thee that where sin abounds in our hearts and our lives thy grace may much more abound to our salvation and to the glory of thy name hear us in our prayer and bless us through this day and partner sins for Jesus sake amen to

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