The problem of evil

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[0:00] We turn this evening to Genesis chapter 3, verse 8. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.
This chapter is a chapter of tragedy. The previous chapter shows to us ideal man, man in his pristine excellence, man in his moral excellence, man in surroundings that were glorious, and the prospects before him were glorious too.
But in this chapter we see how the hopes of Adam were blasted by the tragic consequences of his sin in the garden of paradise.
And here the chapter brings us, this chapter brings us face to face with a problem that has baffled the minds of the greatest intellects of every generation.
[1:36] I'm talking about the problem of evil. evil. Now evil is a potent factor in the conduct of men.

And the sages of the centuries have offered us varied and divergent views as to the origin of evil and as to the rationale of evil.
evil. Now the Bible doesn't set out to explain how evil came into existence. That is a mystery.
Evil is a mystery. And it's a mystery which it is impossible for you or for me to go into. It's beyond us.
But what we are given in the Bible is sufficient information to tell us how evil came into the experience of human beings.
[2:44] The Bible tells us that there was an apostasy from God among the angels before ever there was the apostasy of man from God.

If we turn to the epistle of Jude, it tells us there that the angels which kept not their first estate but left their own habitation, God hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.
So that we are given this information that in the angelic order before this world was ever created there was a rebellion against God.
And at the head of that rebellion among the angels was Satan the prince of darkness.
He rebelled against the authority of God and with him all his associates. And what God did was he thrust Satan out of heaven along with these fallen angels.
[4:02] And of course Satan is the one who goes about the earth as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour or appearing as an angel of light seeking to destroy men by tempting them.

And along with Satan on the loose in the world of tonight there are the demons the fallen angels.
You remember how Jesus tells us about the fall of Satan from heaven. He says I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.
So devastating and so quick was the judgment of God that God sent Satan hurtling from heaven down out from that place.
Now Satan as you know is the devil. He is the enemy of God the arch enemy of God. He is bitterly opposed to God and all that God stands for.
[5:08] How evil originated with the devil we will never know. I find it passes my comprehension I can't understand it.

I can't understand how this excellent angel this chief of all the angels I can't understand how suddenly he was overcome with this lust for power that he exalted himself above all that was God and yet it happened and because the devil did not succeed in overcoming God what he now tried to do and what he succeeded in doing was deface the man who was made in God's image he attacked Adam and Adam fell and this is the story this is the story of the tragedy of Adam.

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I want us just for a little while to consider the psychology of temptation the nature of sin and the tragedy of man.
let's look at the psychology of temptation when the devil plotted the ruin of Adam and his race he used the serpent of which it was said that this creature was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made so there was this attack there was this attack plotted and planned by Satan and it began as we see here with a tentative interrogation now let's just think of why the devil used the serpent you know the serpent is noiseless and not only is the serpent noiseless but the serpent is quick and it's swift they say that if a serpent begins to chase its victim it's very difficult for that victim to elude the serpent and not only is it quick in its movements but it is as we have already said noiseless you can't hear it what does it do the serpent well it begins its deadly work by mesmerizing its victim and not only does it mesmerize its victim but the serpent begins to enfold its victim within its deadly embrace and once it begins to enfold its victim within its deadly embrace you cannot escape from it and once it has done that once it has gripped its victim in its terrible falls its victim is sure to die now this is the method of temptation you see the devil puts a temptation in front of you in front of me and what is the method of that temptation well to mesmerize us we see the thing we are captivated by the thing we are drawn to this thing like a piece of metal is drawn to a magnet and once we become involved in the thing it begins to enfold us within its deadly embrace and once it begins to enfold us in its deadly embrace it then begins its work of destruction that's how the devil operates he makes something so very attractive he puts it there in your way and in my way and we are drawn to it and before we know where we are the thing has us in its grip and when it has us in its grip it refuses to let go until at last we succumb and then it has destroyed us see how the serpent approached
Eve it began in such a cautious way questioning the goodness of God asking this question has God really forbidden you to eat of the trees of the garden you see what the devil said he didn't say has God forbidden you to eat of one tree but he says this he begins to put a doubt into the mind of Eve is God trying to hold back from you the goodness of this garden yea hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden it was a temptation you see to doubt God's generosity see how generous God was to Adam and Eve of every tree thou mayest freely eat I place no limitation upon you except this one thing that you must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that is the bounty of God that is the generosity of God but you see the devil said you know [11:16] God is really keeping everything back from you you know David when he committed his terrible sin with Bathsheba Nathan the prophet was sent to him why was Nathan sent to David to remind David of God's generosity not to remind David of his sin what did God say through Nathan I gave thee the house of Israel and the house of Judah and says God if that had been too little I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things but you see it's the devil who comes to us isn't it and it's the devil who says to us you know

God doesn't want you to enjoy yourself God wants you to be miserable God is withholding this God is withholding that and that's how the devil came to Eve you know Eve God is not really your friend God is withholding something from you if he were your friend he would let you have it now wouldn't you have thought that Eve would have seen that this serpent was nothing more than a deadly monster a deadly monster to be avoided at all costs not only that but the devil made use of this creature to bring about a daring denial of what God had said Eve had underlined the fact that God had given them the use of all the trees but of one but now this is what the serpent boldly asserts ye shall not surely die
God has said to you that you're going to die if you touch of this tree but I am saying this to you ye shall not surely die and the purpose of the devil was to instill into the minds of our first parents Adam and Eve a doubt as to the veracity of God and from that moment onwards this has been characteristic of what the devil has done to us he has instilled into our minds a doubt as to the truth of God look at even Sarah she was a very godly woman the wife of Abraham and yet she was inclined to laugh at God when God said he was going to do this and he was going to do that she laughed until at last an angel came to her and said to her look you be careful God has seen your folly
God has seen how you disbelieve him you better be careful what you are doing what God is saying to you is true and don't you begin to doubt what God is saying to you and not only that but the devil went even further we've said that he began with a tentative interrogation is it true that God has said this then he went on to deny that what God said was true and now there comes from the devil this

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defiant assertion you see not only content with declaring that they would not die by eating the forbidden fruit but the serpent or the devil using the serpent goes on to say that they will definitely benefit by their act of disobedience your eyes your eyes said the devil to them your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil this was the culmination and the temptation they would gain they would gain enormously they would become like
God himself if only they would do what the devil was asking them to do and isn't this part of man's make up today that he thinks he's God and he thinks he's in control of everything and he thinks he knows best what to do with his life he knows best what to do with the world that he is living in and as you and I step back and look at the whole situation we see what a sorry mess the devil has brought about in our world and in our experience what a sorry mess the whole business is your life it's in a mess because of sin your relationships are in a mess because of sin your home your community if sin is the dominating factor then everything is confusion but we go on to notice this the nature of sin and when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes and the tree to be desired to make one wise she took of the fruit thereof and did eat and gave also to her husband and he did eat with her what was it that
[17:29] Eve did what is the nature of the sin what is the nature of sin at all basically well it's rejection of truth on one occasion in his dispute with the Jews Jesus openly declared this he said to these Jews ye are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father ye will do he was a murderer from the beginning and a board not in the truth because there is no truth in him when he speaketh he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own for he is a liar and the father of it oh how well Jesus knew the devil he had known the devil before the devil ever fell but it was different then but

Jesus was there when the devil rebelled against the trinity Jesus saw him cast out and Jesus saw how this creature was nothing but a denial of God a rejection of God and all that God stands for but not only was it rejection of the truth it was rebellion against authority when God said you mustn't eat of this tree you know there is always a desire in the heart and I suppose it's because we are now sinfully orientated that there is this desire in our hearts to do this thing supposing someone was to come in here just now and sit down there in the center wearing black clothes I'm not referring to a minister but wearing black clothes his head covered in black you couldn't see anything at all about this person what would your reaction be curiosity who is this man who is this strange person if only he would remove that thing from his face we might see what he's like and you're not content until at last the whole thing is shown to you and you see who it is or supposing after the service is over you go out of this church and there up in the skies there is a strange object you'll be buying the papers tomorrow listening to every news bulletin what was it that was in the sky what was that strange thing that was moving around there what was it you see
Eve when she saw this tree she wasn't content until at last she took the fruit and passed it over her lips it was rebellion against God's authority when the devil spoke in derogatory terms of God what happened in the case of Adam was this a moral crisis developed within the sphere of his free will will and not only did this moral crisis develop within the sphere of his free will but a great moral catastrophe took place when he decided upon breaching the divine commandment now there is something important here that we've got to remember I'm coming to it in a moment it was nothing less on the part of Adam than open defiance against God when Adam said
I shall in the face of God's thou shalt not you see to revolt against God is the most evil thing you can do and it brings its own nemesis in the book of Proverbs it says the evil man seeketh only rebellion therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him you see in the case of Adam it was deliberate sin and that is why original sin is such a serious thing and why we do well to consider original sin from time to time listen to what Paul has to say about Adam in comparison with Eve you see a man always tends to say well you know it was Eve that first of all brought us down but that's not true that's not true and Adam says Paul was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression and this is what makes it all the more serious that Adam wasn't deceived and yet he rebelled against God and yet he lifted up his heel against his maker and yet he rebelled and turned his back upon God that is the seriousness of original sin in the case of Adam it was a deliberate act and a rejection of God's authority in other words it was arrogant ambition on his part and that's at the root of man's first sin the idea of achieving an advancement of such a kind as to be as God himself so
Adam revolted against his maker but we must hurry on when we come to as we go through Genesis I'm not going to go through Genesis just now in a series of sermons but if you were to go through

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Genesis you would come to that strange incident that occurred the Tower of Babel have you ever thought of it when men assembled on the plain of Shiner and they said we are going to build a tower and its top will reach to heaven what was that it was human arrogance it was man saying I'm going to reach up to heaven by my efforts I'm going to do it on my own I don't need God to take me up to heaven I don't need God to come and help me no said men at that time
[25:24] I can make my own we can make our own way we will build this tower we will lay the foundation and step by step we will make our way up and we will reach up there we reach up to heaven it's the arrogance of man and that arrogance stems from Adam when he thought that by eating of that tree he would be as God himself but notice finally this the tragedy of man you see the beauty and the glory of the image of God was immediately defaced and as you look at Adam now in the garden of Eden he is a total wreck and the first step in the deterioration was this complex of guilt which he now possessed he now had an awakened conscience a thing that he never had before because he didn't need it and the eyes of them both were opened his conscience was now awake and they knew that they were naked before this they had been spiritual beings

God orientated beings with minds of purity and holiness and now they were in moral chaos and they were conscious of the fact that the whole situation had now altered between them and God and not only had it altered between them and God but it had altered between themselves between Adam and Eve no longer any peace instead now antagonism disharmony confusion and they thought oh well we will ease our conscience what we will do now is we will go among the trees we will hide ourselves from God we will take the leaves and we will make ourselves aprons and cover our nakedness no you can't hide from
God among trees you can't hide from God behind leaves thou God seest me thou knowest as we were singing together my down sitting mine uprising yea all my thoughts afar to thee are known if I take the wings of the morning thou art there if I make my bed in hell thou art there oh you can't escape from God just like that how well Shakespeare knew the psychology of the human heart when he wrote his famous play Macbeth and we've quoted this on previous occasions I just refer to it again it's such a good illustration when King Duncan had been murdered at the instigation of Macbeth of Lady Macbeth and by Macbeth himself ah the horror the horror of that atrocious deed came to rest with her and she began sleep walking and as she went about in her in sleep walking she was washing her hands in an imaginary way trying to remove what the blood spots of
Duncan King Duncan that had been left on her hands by that bloody knife that she had taken from her husband and all the time she was saying what's done cannot be undone and so it was with Adam and Eve what's done cannot be undone and the trees couldn't hide them and the leaves couldn't hide them do you remember Job he said this if I wash myself with snow water and make my hands never so clean yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch and mine own clothes shall abhor me no no you can't wash away sin like that in snow water Pontius Pilate thought he could do it oh yes after he had sentenced Jesus bring me a basin of water let me wash my hands from the blood of this just man
I have nothing to do with it ah not that basin not all the basins of the world with water could wash the hands of Pontius Pilate not all the oceans of the rivers could wash away Pontius Pilate foul deed you cannot hide sin with fig leaves or by any other method that's the tragedy of sin that's a tragedy of man and not only that but man was now the object of God's displeasure with the fall his relation to nature as well as to God was radically changed from judging the serpent God said upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat you know why God said that to the serpent to lick the dust is the sign of defeat that's what we sing in
[31:42] Psalm 72 enemies shall lick the dust to lick the dust is the sign of defeat and so God said you're defeated and so it is with the devil he's defeated and hell has been prepared for him and he will be cast in there the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever that's the end of the prince of darkness and from judging the serpent God now turned to the guilty pair the woman you're now says God subjected to a life that will involve you in submission and in pain to the man you're now involved in weariness and frustration and by the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread until at last you die and the earth even the earth was cursed for man's sake its fertility its productiveness were drastically reduced and not only that but all the abnormalities which have been the plague of men down through the years were allowed to appear how changed paradise was how changed now this garden of delight how changed the guilty pair how changed the world all because

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of that fatal rebellion in the garden of

Eden and man was now subject to dissolution to the process of death you know had Adam not sinned he would have been raised beyond the power of death you see death as John Calvin tells us is dissolution of the soul and spirit and the body going into corruption it now has to suffer destruction and a violent change and that's what terrifies us about death isn't it you see death is violent even the man who dies peacefully it's a violent thing at the end when suddenly the body and the soul are separated and the body is buried in the grave to disintegrate but that's not the worst of it it is appointed unto men once to die and after death the judgment and
Paul tells us in his second letter to the Corinthians we he says you and I all of us we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad but I mustn't end on that note thank God he has introduced his scheme of grace thank God he sent his son to take our place and to die our death thank God that he had such love for lost men and women that he gave his only begotten son that whoever might believe on him would not perish but have everlasting life you see what did God do after Adam tried to hide himself with fig leaves God took the skins of animals and he clothed
Adam with these skins and God showed to Adam you know Adam you're not going to die at the moment but it's going to cost life to clothe you and this innocent animal will take your place and its blood will be shed God but this is only a temporary arrangement said God until I send my son and when he will come he will die for the sins of the guilty and he will shed his blood and that blood will cover all sin the blood of Jesus Christ God son cleanseth from all sin oh what a saviour we have but we leave it there what a tragedy but from the tragedy we look to the victory that has been brought by Christ and that victory we will be commemorating when we sit at the
Lord's table together in a fortnight's time if the Lord will spare us let us pray oh Lord we thank thee for thy goodness to us and for this wonderful salvation how foolish we have been as sinners and oh how foolish our first father who rebelled against thee and we confess that that spirit of rebellion is still in us until it is taken out of the way but thanks be to God for Christ who subdues our proud rebellious hearts and who leads us captive take away our sins be with us tonight and take us to our homes and safety for Jesus sake amen the the
[38:37] Hof I t don ■■■ might side anotherBe here is my thing to send you in me can t me T ce

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