Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

A couple of weeks ago we all experienced the devastation of Cyclone Gabrielle. And the week before that there was the terrible earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria, with over 51,000 dead. And we can add to that the war in Ukraine, which has been going on for over a year, with around 42,000 dead. And here in New Zealand, 538 people took their own lives in 2022. Overall, 38,000 people died last year in NZ, with the leading causes being heart disease and cancer. And to death and disease, we can add two more Ds – disability, bodies that do not work as they should, and dysfunction, things like relationship breakdown, financial and emotional stresses, food shortages, political instability, and the list goes on. And on top of all that, while we all come to church wearing a smiley face, go back into the week, and there will have been tears and frustrations and hurts, some light and some deep, some because of things done *to* us and some because of things *we have done to others*. And the name we give to all these things is evil. And the Bible uses that term but also calls it sin. And everything I mentioned is a consequence of the existence of evil or sin. And it powerfully affects *every* second of *every* day for each one of us.

So, **why does evil exist**? Have you ever wondered that? I am sure you have. It is one of the great concerns of philosophy and religion. The Bible says that God is good and all-powerful. So, why does evil exist? One Greek philosopher put it like this: “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not all powerful. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is cruel. Is he both able and willing? Then from whence comes evil?"

And this question is made even more pressing by what we have seen in recent weeks. For at the end of chapter 2, all was “*very good*.” The garden that the man and the woman lived in was “*very good*.” Their marriage was “*very good*.” There were no disasters, diseases, disabilities, dysfunction, or death. So, **where** did these things come from? **What** led to evil entering this “*very good*” creation? **How** and **when** did this happen? And **why** did this happen? Well, the ***where*** and ***when*** and ***what*** and ***how*** is Genesis 3:1-7. And we are going to see that as we consider the **historical event** described in Genesis 3. That will be the first part of this sermon. But we will have to go elsewhere in the Bible to consider the ***why*** of it all. And that will be the **theological explanation** of this event, the second part of this sermon.

And this is a most important topic. To fully understand what Christ did for you, you must understand what happened here in the garden. But this topic is also one of the most **common objections** to Christianity. People say, ‘How can God allow evil and suffering?’ Or they will ask it like this: If you claim that the God of the Bible is good and kind and loving, yet all this evil and suffering exists, then I refuse to believe in your God. Have you had someone throw that one at you before? And for many people, this is their biggest hurdle to the claims of Christianity. And the name of any attempt to answer this question is **Theodicy**. Theodicy means ‘vindication of God.’ And we need a theodicy; we need to be able to explain why evil exists when God is good and sovereign, so that people will seek God, through faith in Christ.

1. Well, let’s begin then with the **Historical Event** that is described in our text.
   1. Last week we considered Adam naming the animals. And one of the animals that he would have named was the **serpent**.
      1. Now, after the Fall, God cursed the serpent and said, “*Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life*.” It would seem then that before the Fall, the serpent was some sort of upright and impressive creature.
      2. And we are told of the pre-Fall serpent that it was “***more crafty*** *than any other beast in the field*.” And this description of the serpent is fascinating. The Hebrew root used here can have a positive and negative connotation. Positively, it means prudent or wise or shrewd. Negatively, it means crafty or devious. And it is *definitely* in the negative form here. But when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the Greek word chosen was positive – it means wise, intelligent, and sensible. It is the same word that Jesus used when He instructed believers to “*be wise as serpents and innocent as doves*.” So, what are we to make of this description of the serpent? Well, the New Testament sometimes describes the devil as “the serpent.” For example, **Revelation 20:2** says, “*And He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan*.” What is clear then is that this ordinary, shrewd serpent had come under the influence of the devil, which makes this the first instance of demon-possession in the Bible. And so, the natural shrewdness of the serpent was twisted by the devil for his own ends.
      3. And let me just repeat here what we said in the very first sermon in this series, which is that **the devil was created as a good angel**, together with all the other angels, probably on the first day of creation. But we know from elsewhere in Scripture that Satan led a rebellion among the angels and a third of the angels were cast out of heaven and are the fallen or evil angels. And we don’t know exactly how long after creation week that the Fall happened. But it was probably not long afterwards, given that Adam and Eve had not had any children yet, which would have been a priority for them. But all we can say for sure is that the rebellion of the evil angels took place sometime between the first day of creation and the Fall.
      4. And we will come back to the rebellion of the angels as part of the why does evil exist question. For now, though, in terms of this event, it is Satan who was at work through this serpent.
   2. So, let’s now look at **the encounter between the serpent and the woman**.
      1. And the serpent began the conversation by saying, “*Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?*’” And there are several things to consider here:
         1. First, both here in chapter 3 and elsewhere in the Bible, we are told that the woman was **deceived**, which means tricked or conned or duped, by the serpent. And it is vital that we know this as we try and understand what unfolded here.
         2. And the deception began in the fact that **he approached *her***. For Adam was the one created first; not her. Adam was the one who received the command of God not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; not her. Adam was the one who named the animals; not her. And she was created to be Adam’s helper; not the other way around. And if it is the case that this temptation happened soon after creation week, then it maybe that she and Adam had not had extensive conversations about God, the ins and outs of His provision and command, and how they were to relate to the animals. And this could explain why she did not recognize that there was something completely wrong about a talking serpent and go and get Adam for this conversation. And it would also explain why she did not *fully* state God’s provision and *added* to God’s command, as we shall see later, and why she fell for the devil’s lies.
         3. But his deception continued as he **planted the seed of doubt in her mind**. For in saying, “*Did God actually say*…” he introduced doubt. What *did* God actually say? Had Adam told her the truth? Was God hiding something, keeping something back…? At the very least, his assertion led her to wonder and doubt and question what God had actually said.
      2. But apart from the fact that she should have told the serpent to speak to her husband, **her initial reply** was not *too* bad. God had not forbidden them from eating the fruit of any of the trees in the garden; they were allowed to eat the fruit of the trees in the garden.
         1. But if you look back at **chapter 1:29**, God permitted them to eat from *every* plant-yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and *every* tree with seed in its fruit. So, she did not fully reflect God’s bountiful provision to them.
         2. And she also **added something** that God had not said; she said, “*neither shall you touch it,*” in relation to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. For God did not forbid them from touching the tree, only from eating its fruit.
      3. Well, the serpent immediately latched on to these discrepancies and piled up the allure, as he now **outright lied** and said, “*You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*.”
         1. And if you were here a couple of weeks ago, you may remember that we said that if Adam and the woman had steadfastly obeyed God and not eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, then they would eventually have been allowed to eat from the Tree of life and enter into eternal life.
         2. So again, this suggests a short time between creation week and the Fall. Adam and Eve have probably not established long habits and patterns of obedience. And the serpent has told her that she can have it all, *now*, if she would just eat from this tree that God has lied about.
   3. So next, whether it was immediately or sometime soon after, when she“***saw that the tree was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was good for food, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate***.” The lies of the serpent had had their effect. She had been deceived. Instead of trusting in God’s word (and that is the key here!), she believed the devil’s lies, trusted in what she could see with her eyes, and followed the desires of her heart. And so, she ate.
      1. And congregation, **this is what lies behind all disobedience**. God gives each person a conscience, on which is written “*the works of the law*,” **Romans 2:15** tells us. So, by and large, we know what is right and wrong. But conscience can be trained, rightly or wrongly. And that is why God has given us His law, in black and white, in the Bible, that we might know, objectively, what is right and what is wrong; what pleases Him and what displeases Him; what brings blessing and what brings curse.
         1. And this is why the Psalmist said, “*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul … the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes … by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward*.”
      2. **But the devil says to us, “Did God actually say…?”** *Do* you have to keep the law? You will be *happier* if you do not. It will feel *so* good. Those laws were for a *different time and culture*. You don’t have to worry about law because you are saved by grace! You can just get forgiveness afterwards! How can something that makes you so happy be wrong or bad? No one will get hurt. How could this be wrong? Everyone else does it.
         1. Do any of these lies or questions or excuses sound familiar to you? I am sure they do. I am sure you have had these internal debates in your heart and mind, many times. Whether it is disobeying Mum or Dad, cheating on a test, engaging in lustful thoughts or behaviours, losing your temper, or a thousand other things, to give in to temptation is to reject the commands of God and to instead believe the lies of the devil or the world, to choose what you can see or feel, and to follow the desires of your heart.
         2. Romans 1 calls this **suppressing the truth in unrighteousness**. Have you seen those cartoons that have a little white angel on one shoulder and a little red devil on the other shoulder, and they are both trying to convince the person to listen to them? Well, to suppress the truth in unrighteousness is to ignore the word of God, whether that be your conscience or the written law, and to listen to the voice that says, Go on! Do it!
      3. My friend, if you are not a Christian, this is the key thing you must wrestle with today. **This book contains the law of God**. It is the standard by which you will be judged when Christ comes again. But the devil does not want you to believe this. He wants you to ignore the law of God and the God who has given you His law. He wants you to make your own choices; to choose your own lifestyle; to go your own way. He wants you to think that obeying the law will make your life miserable. He is speaking in your mind, right now, telling you to ignore what that idiot up the front is saying. But I am telling you *the truth*!
         1. Now, the fact is that you cannot keep the law perfectly, which is the only standard that God can accept. Every one of us here is a lawbreaker, a billion times over. So, what we deserve is death and eternal condemnation in hell.
         2. But that is where the **good news** of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ comes in. “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.” The way to forgiveness and eternal life in heaven is through believing that Jesus obeyed the law while on earth, for you, and that He died on the cross to pay for your law-breaking. For then, when you stand before God on Judgment Day, what He will see is Christ’s perfection, and He will welcome you to eternal life.
         3. So, you must believe that God has given you His law, that it is good, that you have broken it, and that your only hope for salvation is faith in Jesus. And you must confess your sins, repent of your sins, and follow Christ.
      4. And to those of you who are Christians, who do follow Christ, **you must believe that God’s law is good and that it is for your good**. (Repeat).
         1. I have told you before about **Rachel Gilson**. She was an atheist and a lesbian. And when she started to consider the claims of Christianity, she could see that the Bible plainly describes same-sex activity as unnatural and a wicked abomination. But she couldn’t understand *why*. No one gets hurt. It made her happy. What was the big deal? And what helped her see that these were the lies of the devil was this part of Scripture. You see, the same things could be said about this first command to Adam and the woman. I mean, what was *so* wrong about eating from that tree? Who did it hurt? But God had forbidden it. And God is good. And His law is good. So, even if we do not understand the reason, we must trust in God’s goodness. And the same is true for every command, big or small. You must believe that God’s law is good and that it is for your good. Only then will you strive to obey it.
   4. Well, that brings us next to **Adam**. We read, “*And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate*.”
      1. You know, all my life, I have heard and understood and believed that **he was with her *the whole time***; that he heard this whole conversation and didn’t step in as he should have. Have you heard that before?
      2. And it is not possible to be dogmatic about this, because it is not stated explicitly, either way, but having spent the week studying this passage, and other relevant parts of Scripture, it seems more likely to me now that **Adam was *not* present for the conversation with the serpent**.
         1. Let me explain why *from the text*. Later on, when God confronted Adam and the woman, Adam blamed the woman for giving him the fruit and she blamed the serpent for deceiving her. So, Adam didn’t claim to have been deceived. And **1 Timothy 2:14** states this, explicitly: “*Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived*.” So, Adam was not deceived by the serpent. He didn’t fall for the lies of the serpent. He just took the fruit that his wife offered him and ate some.
         2. And congregation, this makes his sin ***much worse*** than hers. For it means that Adam’s sin was outright unbelief and rebellion. He just chose to disobey. *And he could have stopped this*! As the covenant head of creation, as the one to whom God gave the command and the warning of certain death, as the husband of the wife God had made and brought to him to be his helper, as the proto-type priest, he could have interceded with the Lord on her behalf. He could have taken her by the hand and begged the Lord to restore her. He could have offered himself in her place. He could have sanctified her, cleansed her, that her guilt could be taken away. In other words, he could have redeemed his bride. But he didn’t. He joined her in breaking God’s commandment as he ate.
      3. And in so doing, **the fate of all humanity was sealed**. This is why **1 Corinthians 15:21-22** says, “*For as by a man came death … For as in Adam all die*.” And as we heard in **Romans 5:12-19** earlier: “*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man … because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man … For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners* …” It was Adam’s wicked sin that fully and finally brought condemnation to all humanity.
   5. And then we see what must be **the most pathetic attempt ever** to patch up what is beyond broken, as they tried to sew fig leaves together to cover their nakedness. But spoiler alert – there is a whole theology of covering hinted at here that will unfold further in the chapter and in the rest of the Bible. And it is a covering that *only God can provide*, and which is available to all those who put their faith in Christ! So, hold that thought!
   6. But before we conclude with the why of all this, I want to briefly return to those verses I just quoted about sin and death coming to all people because of the sin of Adam. Each of those verses that I quoted goes on to say that just as sin and death came by Adam, so life and resurrection and grace and justification and righteousness and eternal life come by faith in Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus Christ came to undo or repair or put right what Adam ruined in the garden. And so, **to understand our connection to Christ, we must understand our connection to Adam**.
      1. And I mention this because many professing Christians do not believe in a literal and historical Adam and Eve. They hold to evolution. They see the Adam and Eve account as a quaint myth that was nice for dumb Old Testament folk to believe, but we are clever and we have science.
      2. But congregation, our problem is not just the things we do or do not do. Our problem runs much deeper than that. We also share in Adam’s original sin, because He was our covenant head. And from him, we inherit a sinful nature. The Heidelberg Catechism expresses it like this: Our nature is so poisoned, that “we are born sinners, corrupt from conception on.”
      3. So, **true doctrine or correct doctrine requires us to believe in a literal and historical Adam and Eve and the Fall**. Because the Scriptures connect Christ’s redemption work to Adam’s ruining work, to fully understand and appreciate what Christ has saved you from, you must believe in Adam and Eve and the Fall.
2. Well, that’s the historical event. And it brings us, secondly and finally, to the **theological** **Explanation** or the **why** of this event. And we will be *much* shorter here, because of the work we have done together in the first section of the sermon.
   1. Our questions here are: Why does evil exist? Is God to blame for evil? And in terms of today: How can a good God allow so much misery and suffering? And congregation, we must seek our answers from Scripture. What we have seen is that the original temptation was supplied by the devil, who used the serpent. In **John 8:44**, Jesus called the devil “*a liar and the father of lies*.” **Revelation 12:9** calls him “*the deceiver of the whole world*.” So, it was the devil who supplied the lies that tempted the woman, which led, also, to Adam’s sin. But that just kicks the question one step back. Why is the devil evil? Why did he and some of the other angels fall away, as we noted earlier? The Bible identifies pride as the original sin of Satan and those angels that fell away. So, where did that pride come from? Did God tempt them towards this sin? In other words, is God to blame for evil?
      1. Well, in **James 1:13-15**, we read these words: “*When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone*.” So, we cannot say that God tempted the angels that fell. We cannot say that God is the *author* of sin, the *doer* of a wicked thing. That would be blasphemy.
      2. But the Bible is clear that God is **sovereign**; that nothing occurs apart from or outside of His will. As Job put it in chapter **42:2**, “*I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted*.” So, evil or sin cannot be something that surprises God; that He has no ultimate control over; that He just has to react to. For then He would not be sovereign. Therefore, sin must be a part of what God has willed to be. And God Himself is very clear about this in His word. Listen to **Amos 3:6**: “*Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?*” And in **Isaiah 45:6-7**, God said, “*I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things*.”
         1. After the Christchurch earthquake, the Dean of the cathedral preached a sermon designed to comfort the distressed in Christchurch. He said, ‘God did not want this earthquake. God is crying too.’ Does the dean not read the Bible? The God of the Bible does not hide His sovereignty over all things, including evil!
      3. Now, we are entering here into the realm of **God’s secret will** here. And we are reminded in **Deuteronomy 29:29** that “*the secret things belong to God*.” So, there is mystery here that we must be content with. But in terms of how God can will sin to exist and still not be the author of sin, I have found the explanation of the theologian **Jonathan Edwards** helpful:
         1. He says that willing that sin exist in the world is not the same as sinning. God does not *commit* sin in willing that there be sin. God has established a world in which sin will necessarily come to pass by God’s permission, but not by His “positive agency.” And so, it is appropriate and best to speak of God as “**the permitter** . . . **of sin**; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events … that sin . . . will most certainly and infallibly follow.”
         2. And Edwards uses **the analogy of the way the sun brings about** light and warmth by its essential nature but brings about dark and cold by dropping below the horizon. So, the sun is not the cause or fountain of cold and darkness, in the way that it is the cause or fountain of light and heat. But there is a relationship or connection between the Sun and cold and darkness. And similarly, “sin is not the fruit of any positive agency or influence of the most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of His action and energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the want of His influence.”
         3. Is this helpful congregation? There is still mystery here, I know. But can you see how God can will sin to exist and still not be the author of sin? I hope you can.
   2. But that still leaves us with the why question: Why did God will evil or sin to exist? I want to give you three reasons:
      1. The first reason is that **evil exists to highlight God’s glory and goodness and grace**. (repeat)
         1. I have previously shared an illustration with you about a man buying diamonds for an engagement ring. But all the diamonds looked dull and all the same, until the jeweller remembered that he had forgotten to put his black velvet cloth down on the counter-top. And when he laid the cloth down and the man looked at the diamonds again, now they really sparkled!
         2. And in a similar way, the black cloth of evil highlights God’s glory, goodness, and grace. We have stated several times in previous sermons that God’s will was always to permit the Fall and to save some of fallen humanity through faith in Christ. And this requires sin and evil. For Jesus Christ to be so lovely, for forgiveness and grace and mercy to have meaning and be so desirable, and for eternal life to be something we long for, there must be evil and sin.
         3. So, when your workmate says to you, how can a good God allow so much evil and suffering to go on? Your answer must include that God is not the author of evil; we are. We commit sin. But God permits all this, including disasters and disease and death, that we might seek forgiveness in Christ and life in the new heavens and new earth.
      2. And this leads us into the second and closely related reason why **evil exists, which is to teach us what hell will be like** **and to make us yearn for heaven.**
         1. Yes, disasters and disease and disability and decay and dysfunction and the evil that we do towards one another *are* truly awful things. But at least, in this life, there is also beauty and light and health and harmony and friendship and proper functioning and joy and goodness. But friends, there will only be disease and decay and disability and distress in hell, always and forever. But there will be none of those things in the new heavens and earth. And the only way to escape the horrors of hell and enjoy the bliss of heaven is through faith in Jesus Christ.
      3. But the third reason that evil exists is revealed in **1 John 3:10**. For there we read: “*By this (meaning how people behave) it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil*.” And we call this **the antithesis** – the division in humanity between the children of God and the children of the devil, or those who are for Christ and those who are against Him. And the Fall was necessary to reveal these two parts of humanity.
         1. And we need to understand this about our world. Do you want to know why people ram-raid shops, and murder one another, and why drag queens are reading stories to children at your local library, and why governments all round the world are bringing in conversion therapy legislation and hate speech laws and freeing up access to abortion? It is called the antithesis. It is because there are those who are against Christ and His people. And it is only if you understand this that you will take seriously the Lord’s command to put on the full armour of God. We are in a spiritual battle! Now, the good news is that Jesus is going to win! But the battle is hard, because this world is hostile towards Christ and His people.

So, evil exists to highlight the glory, grace, and goodness of God, to teach us what hell is like and make us yearn for heaven, and to reveal those who are the children of the devil and those who are the children of God. And I want to draw us to a close today with another term that the Bible uses to describe the children of God, which is **the bride of Christ**. Earlier in the sermon, I said that Adam could have offered himself in the place of his bride. He could have sanctified her, cleansed her, that her guilt could be taken away. In other words, he could have redeemed his bride. But he didn’t. And some of you might recognize that language as coming from Ephesians 5. For there we read that Christ “*loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*.”

Congregation, evil exists, so that Jesus Christ could come and sanctify and cleanse His bride, to one day be with her in the new heavens and new earth. Will you be among that people? Let us pray:

Amen.