

Marriage spoiled Gen 3:1-24

Tim Anderson 6/1/2018

One of my favourite books is called 'A Fortunate Life'.
It's the autobiography of Bert Facey.
Bert grew up in a dysfunctional home situation just over 100 years ago.
And he left home and made his own way in the world
at about the age of 10.
Bert's case was extreme,
but he wasn't that different from many of his generation.
They bred 'em tough back then.
Contrast that to today,
and sometimes children are still living at home in their 30s.
And with that often comes a deficit
of having to take responsibility for their own lives.
My Y12 Chemistry teacher used to complain
about the lack of responsibility of my generation
with his favourite put down,
"Did mummy tie up your shoe laces for you this morning, boy?"
In the years since the retirement of my Chemistry teacher,
a new phrase has entered the lexicon.
You need to 'man up'.
It means get the courage to take responsibility for your situation.
People invent new phrases when they see a need for them.
What more can I say?
No one ever told Bert Facey to 'man up' as a 19 y.o.
in the trenches of Gallipoli.
He'd already been living as a man for 9 years.

We're doing a sermon series on marriage.
Last week we looked at God's good plan for marriage.
This week we look at how marriage has been spoiled.
We're looking at Genesis 3
and I repeat the same disclaimer as last week.
I'm not preaching the passage,
I'm preaching the topic.
Genesis 3 is one of the most important passages in the Bible.

It explains to us how we got in the predicament that made it necessary for God to send his only Son. But today we're ignoring the main point of the passage, and just mining it for what it has to say about marriage. And that is tied up with taking responsibility.

Last week we saw that God gave to Adam the responsibility of exercising loving leadership in his relationship with his wife.

So who does Satan target when he want to spoil God's good world? Why he comes and has a chat to Eve.

Now naturally, Satan was interested in promoting rebellion against God. But in terms of the married couple, he was interested in overturning the order that God had built into their relationship.

If the man is supposed to take responsibility, then Satan will try to get the woman to take his place.

And he will try to get the man to passively go along with things. Satan's plan was successful.

Eve took the initiative.

Adam followed his wife into sin.

And then God turned up to hold people to account.

And who did God ask to give an accounting for their actions?

Was it the woman who had led the charge into sin?

No it was not.

It was the man to whom God had given the responsibility for leadership. He might have been the passive player in the rebellion.

Eve made the running.

If they were kids in the playground,

you would talk more sternly to the one who had been the ringleader.

But God called on Adam to account for his actions in the first instance.

Because God had given Adam responsibility.

Adam had shirked his responsibility and passively followed his wife.

And when God confronted Adam, did he 'man up'?

No he did not.

He tried to pass the blame onto his wife.
Or onto God.
"It's either her fault because she made me do it.
Or it's your fault, God,
because you put her here with me.
There's only one person who's not at fault.
That's me.
I refuse to take responsibility.
I will not 'man up'."
Pathetic.
God could be excused for asking the question,
'Why did I bother making a man if he won't be a man?'

And this sorry saga points us
to the chief relationship failing of husbands and wives.
When they are getting things wrong,
Husbands typically avoid responsibility.
They passively pass responsibility that they should be bearing
onto their wives.
Wives when they are getting it wrong,
typically they try to take over the husband's responsibility.
Either they cover for him because he won't man up.
Or they actively try to undermine his responsibility
because there's a little voice inside of them,
pictured in today's story as a snake,
who tells them that they should really be the one in leadership.

These twin relationship failings are as visible today
as they were in our Bible reading penned 3500 years ago.
How many men sent the wife and children
off to church and Sunday School?
I'm not talking about men who were not believers.
I'm talking about men who claimed to be believers,
but wouldn't man up and take spiritual responsibility in their families.
How many men decided
that reading the Scriptures and praying with their children
was their wives' responsibility?

And it's not just spiritual stuff.

How many men opt out of discipline?

Leave the wife to do the heavy lifting with the children.

How many women make soft comments to friends and acquaintances just privately wondering about their husband's spiritual maturity?

Just laying the groundwork for a case as to why they have to take control.

How many women complain that their husband won't take any responsibility for the discipline of the children, but when he does, they undermine what he says or does?

And those dynamics are in Christian families.

If you look at people in the community more broadly, it's even more pronounced.

Where are men failing to take responsibility?

Well they won't even take responsibility for their own children full stop.

They don't get married.

They father children,

and leave women to bring them up as single mothers.

That's the ultimate opting out of responsibility.

The ultimate in selfishness.

And where are women trying to seize control?

Well they are intentionally getting pregnant without involving the father of the child in child's life.

Some don't even tell the father that he is the father.

Some use sperm donation techniques

so even they can't know who the father is.

It's the ultimate in seizing the responsibility for leading families that God has given to fathers.

Genesis 3 may have been written down 3500 years ago, but it has a surprisingly contemporary ring to it.

The relationship dynamics between husbands and wives are as old as creation.

Well just as the behaviour of the first woman and the first man can be seen reflected in the relationships of people today, so too the punishment that God gave to Eve can be seen in relationships today.

Of course God gave Adam a punishment too, but that punishment related to his work.

The frustration of work is the subject of another whole sermon.

But for Eve,

God's punishment related to her relationship with her husband and the fruit from that relationship.

"To the woman, the Lord God said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children, your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'"

And so the marriage relationship has been forever spoiled.

There can never be a human marriage without some struggle for power.

Now when I give a punishment to my children,

I expect that they will take it without trying to dodge.

You do the crime,

you do the time.

But it's not like that with God's judgement on human rebellion.

The judgement is there and it won't go away.

But if there's something we can do to ease the consequences,

God won't see that as further rebellion.

We will never achieve it,

but we can strive to live as close

to the perfect picture in Genesis 2 as possible.

But what will we be struggling against?

Well back in Genesis 1,

God gave humanity a task,

"Be fruitful and increase in number;

fill the earth and subdue it."

And every aspect of that task is now subject to frustration.

"Be fruitful and increase in number."

That's a command to have children.

But now childbirth will be painful.
And I might add dangerous.
God commanded Adam to subdue the earth.
And now the ground is cursed
and Adam will only eat through painful toil.
And the relationship that God made good,
a helper suitable for the man, ...
bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, ...
the two will become one flesh.
That beautiful unity becomes a struggle.
"Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."
This is not how it was meant to be.
But this is now the default position.
If our marriage relationships drift along,
that is where they will end up.
And even if we strive with all our energy
if we pray like mad for our spouse,
if we keep ourselves spiritually fresh through being with God's people
and reading his word,
we will only ever have partial success
in bringing it back to the beautiful picture we saw last week.

What does it actually mean,
'your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you'?
Now that is a question that puzzles even the best of Bible scholars.
The trick is that the word translated desire
is only used twice in the Bible.
So that makes it hard to pin down.
It could mean,
the woman will have such a strong desire
for intimacy and companionship,
that she will end up getting trampled in the relationship,
and keep coming back to the relationship even though it's abusive.
That's my intuitive sense as I read the English translation.
There is another possibility.
The other use of that word 'desire' is in Genesis 4:7.

It's the story of Cain and Abel.

God says to Cain,

"If you do not do what is right,

sin is crouching at your door;

it desires to have you,

but you must rule over it."

So in this verse the word is translated 'desires to have you'.

Taken in that sense,

our verse,

'your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you'

would take the meaning,

the woman will have a strong urge to control her husband

but he will get trampled in the relationship anyway.

It's hard to decide between the two senses.

The best scholar of Genesis, Gordon Wenham, can't decide.

But the broad picture is clear.

What should have been a relationship of beauty and unity

becomes a power struggle.

And both of the possible meanings for desire

make sense of our experience.

We do see women abused in relationships

who have such a strong desire for their partner,

that they return to him time and time again,

long after all their friends are telling them to get out.

And we do see women with a strong urge to control their partner,

and the power struggle in the relationship

escalates and the man tries to rule over the woman.

And notice that the phrase 'rule over' is not being used

with the sense of loving leadership

that we saw in the creation last week.

This is an oppressive domination.

This is no longer a helper suitable for him,

it's a slave to serve him.

And that is in no one's best interests.

It's not in the man's best interests to have a slave instead of a partner.

He loses someone to love.
You don't love your slaves,
you use them.
It's certainly not in the woman's best interests.
She is the victim of oppression, and often violence.

If this is the situation,
how should we respond?

Well the dominant response in our community is feminism.
Feminism holds the upper hand in the media,
the universities and the corridors of government.
The basic response of feminism is this.

"If the man thinks he's going to rule over me,
well I will fight back and rule over him."

It might have the upper hand in our society,
but the results have been dreadful.

The men who have been told
that their role of loving leadership in the home was not required
have in large numbers opted out of taking responsibility all together.
This has left a generation of single mums bringing up children alone.
And has it reduced the oppression and violence against women?
Not a bit of it.

Yes we have loud noises of protest about domestic violence
from the media and women's groups.

Our own Anglican church in Melbourne has a
'prevention of violence against women' worker.

We have advertising campaigns and anger management seminars.
But is violence against women actually decreasing?

No. It's increasing.

Why?

Well when there's conflict,
fighting back and escalating the situation
rarely results in less people getting hurt.

And at its heart,
feminism is a movement to fight back.

Very appealing if you've been oppressed.

But not something that will result in a cohesive community.

There is a better alternative.

The better alternative is to aim to re-establish the order that God instituted in Genesis 2.

The partnership where there was loving leadership but not oppression.

The partnership where there was unity where the two became one flesh.

Now let it be said from the outset,

that this is a project that can only ever achieve partial success.

We can't escape the consequences of the fall.

There will always be something of a power struggle in our marriages.

But we can work hard

and pray hard to minimise that.

For the husbands to exercise leadership in the way that Jesus would.

For the wives to receive leadership in the way that Jesus would,

even when it's clear that their husband is definitely not Jesus.

And you know a beautiful marriage

is a powerful apologetic for the Christian faith.

In an era where the church's reputation

is rightly tarnished by clergy sexual abuse.

In an era where the church is labelled

(largely wrongly I think) as homophobic and intolerant.

In an era where society at large has decided on its own morality

and will take a generation or two

to recognise the consequences

of departing from the manufacturer's instructions,

a beautiful marriage is a powerful apologetic.

You see the world can throw around all sorts of barbs,

but they recognise relationships that are working.

And in a society that is becoming increasingly dysfunctional,

working relationships are attractive.

That's true of all of our relationships.

But marriages are the closest and most intimate of relationships.

They are a power for good when they work

and a power for destruction when they don't.

I'll leave you with an example of a marriage that worked.

Those of you who come to the 5pm prayer meeting will know of my fondness for the Great Awakening preacher Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan and his wife Sarah had a great marriage and 11 children as fruit of that union.

An American educator, A.E. Winship decided to trace the descendants of Jonathan Edwards almost 150 years after his death. His findings are remarkable, especially when compared to another man from the same time period known as Max Jukes.

Jonathan Edwards' legacy includes: 1 U.S. Vice-President,
1 Dean of a law school,
1 dean of a medical school,
3 U.S. Senators,
3 governors,
3 mayors,
13 university presidents,
30 judges,
60 doctors,
65 professors,
75 Military officers,
80 public office holders,
100 lawyers,
100 clergymen,
and 285 university graduates.

Max Jukes' legacy came to people's attention when the family trees of 42 different men in the New York prison system were traced back to him. He lived in New York at about the same period as Edwards. The Jukes family originally was studied by sociologist Richard L. Dugdale in 1877. Jukes' descendants included:
7 murderers,

60 thieves,
190 prostitutes,
150 other criminals,
310 paupers, (that means people who died
with their estate unable to pay for their funeral)
and 440 who were physically wrecked by addiction to alcohol.
Of the 1,200 descendants that were studied,
300 died prematurely.
Needless to say,
Jukes children' were not the product of beautiful marriage.

Now I don't want you to take from that
that if you are not descended from a great man like Jonathan Edwards,
then you'll never amount to much.
Nor do I want you to take it,
that if your great grandfather went to jail
that you are doomed to repeat his mistakes.
There is tremendous redeeming power in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But I do want you to take it
that marriage is an important part of God's plan for human flourishing.
I do want you to take it that marriage has been spoiled by the fall.
It has become a power struggle.
And I do want you to take it that the best way to respond to that
is not to try to win the power struggle.
It's to do your best to pray and strive
for the unity and partnership God intended originally.