

Stories: Part 2

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Date: 12 April 2026

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[0:00] It's the great quest. It's overcoming the monster.! It's rags to riches.

! It's love lost and then found.! It's tragedy turned to comedy. And the happily ever after. Perhaps these stories thrill our hearts because they echo a true story.

Perhaps there really is an ultimate hero who came on a mission to fight evil. To give up his life to rise again and to be one with his people forever.

What if the fairy tale is true? What if Jesus is the hero of heroes? That's Glenn Scrivener. I'm preaching four slightly eccentric sermons on the theme of story.

And we began this morning with the beginning of every story once upon a time. In the beginning, if you missed it, you can go on YouTube and kill half an hour with that.

[1:02] Tonight, we look at the second part of a fairy story. And what's the second part of a fairy story? It all goes wrong. Evil enters in. And then next Sunday night, we're going to look at a rescuer. And then the following Sunday night, we're going to look at happily ever after.

It all goes wrong. Every story has a villain. Every story has a villain. The big bad wolf.

The troll under the bridge. Darth Vader. Darth Maul. Darth Sidious. The wicked witch of the west.

Sauron. Voldemort. Cruella de Vil. Every story has a villain because yours does.

But you don't live like that. Most people don't live as if the story has a villain. How have we missed that?

[2:07] All the stories that we tell have evil in them. They tell us of the presence of an evil power. All the dark characters that send chills down our spine and give us sleepless nights.

Why are they given to us? They are given to us as a warning. There's an evil cast around us. War. Famine. Betrayal. Murder.

Violence. We know, don't we, that there's evil in this world. But where did it come from? What's its motive? How are we to find refuge from it?

So this morning we began at the beginning and I want us to go back there tonight. In the beginning something happened. Something happened before our moment on the stage.

Before mankind came angels. We talked about it last Sunday, didn't we? But angels, if we asked people what are angels like, they would think of cherubs, wouldn't they?

[3:06] They would think of rosy-cheeked, little chubby children wearing white. Often seen as soft and cuddly. But in nearly every record that we have in the Bible of angelic visitations, their first words are fear not.

Why? Because angels are terrifying. Let me give you some verses. 2 Chronicles 32 verse 21. Let me read this to you.

2 Chronicles 32 21. And the Lord sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of the Assyria. So he returned with shame of faith to his own land.

2 Samuel 24 15 and 16. So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time and there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, it's enough.

Now stay your hand. Revelation 9 verses 14 to 15 says to the sixth angel with the trumpet release the four angels who are bound to the great river Euphrates. So the four angels who have been prepared for the hour, the day, the month and the year were released to kill a third of mankind.

[4:28] And God says there are 10,000 times 10,000 of them. The Bible is unashamed about angels. The Bible is unashamedly supernaturalistic.

Francis Schaeffer who founded our denomination and founded this congregation and when he went to a university mission you know they'd have a week of events where they kind of speak to people who are not Christians about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and they kind of put their best foot forward and you put your best speakers on you try to be as appealing as you can.

Francis Schaeffer always began on the first night by speaking about angels. Such a strange thing isn't it? Why did he begin speaking about angels and the reason he said he did that was because he wanted the students to know that he was speaking about something supernatural.

That Christianity is unashamedly supernaturalistic. And as you come to the Bible particularly the gospels I don't know whether you realise there are angels everywhere. At every crucial point of the Lord Jesus' career there are angels.

angels. In fact the word angel appears more often in the New Testament than the word sin or the word love. The word angel occurs more frequently than any either of those words.

[5:47] Arthur Sproul said you can no more cut the angels out of the gospel record than you can the miracles without being guilty of biblical vandalism. They are everywhere in the gospel accounts not like some kind of varnish or gloss that has been sprayed on by some pious believers but they are deeply embedded in the story.

And so we need to speak about angels more than we do. Number one point number one evil enters the stage. Evil enters the stage.

It seems to me that the Bible indicates the origin of the devil and the origin of evil more by hints than by direct statements. and we see that he was one of the sons of the angels of God.

And apparently he was the brightest of them or one of the brightest of them and the reason that that angel has fallen is because he was preoccupied with his own beauty and his own glory and with his ambition to unseat God the God of glory from his throne.

So let's go to a couple of passages that we don't often go to. Let's go to Isaiah chapter 14. All right? Isaiah chapter 14. I'll shout out the pages. It's on page 577.

[7:06] Isaiah chapter 14. It's on page 578. And the prophet Isaiah there is describing the king of Babylon. But he's describing him in highly symbolic language.

There's a double meaning to these words. Isaiah 14 verses 12 to 15. How you are fallen from heaven. O day star, sun of dawn.

How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low. You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself the most high. It's speaking of the king.

And yet, it's also symbolic. Come with me to Ezekiel chapter 28. And these are the two passages which describe to us in veiled terms the origin of the devil.

[8:10] And Ezekiel 28 is on page 715. There's a description of the king of Tyre. And again, it's taunting language. It's prophetic language. It's highly symbolic.

Ezekiel 28 and verse 12 on page 715. Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, thus says the Lord God, here it is, you were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom, perfect and beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering. Sardius, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, carbuncle. And crafted in gold, gold were your settings and your engravings.

On the day that you were created, they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you there on the holy mountain of God, in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. Standing at the head of the vast legion of angels was a captain, the most beautiful, the most powerful of them all, the commander of the armies of God, the guardian of the glory of God, the sun of the morning, as glorious as the sun unequalled.

[9:23] C.S. Lewis writes this, of all bad men, religious bad men are the worst. Of all created beings, the wickedest is the one who originally stood in the immediate presence of God.

And so pride enters the devil's heart. Now, admittedly, these passages, they raise as many questions as they answer. but they are telling us something of immense importance and significance.

But pride and self was at the heart of the devil's fall. Ezekiel is telling us that the devil was unwilling to take his place as created.

He grasped at glory which was not his but belonged to God alone. He sought to exalt himself over God. the devil wanted God's authority.

It was flagrant ambition but fundamentally pride. This excellent being believed that somehow he was being cheated. He was missing out.

[10:34] He didn't just want to play a role in the noble story. He wanted the story to be about him. He coveted the throne. He wanted to be the star.

He was desperate to be the main character. He wanted the worship and the adoration which was due to God to be for himself. And so in Ezekiel 28 verse 17 your heart was proud because of your beauty.

You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground. I exposed you before kings to feast their eyes on you. Think of the stories that we tell.

Think of the echoes that we tell. The witch in Snow White who cannot cope with not being the most beautiful. Anakin Skywalker turning to the dark side becomes Darth Vader.

Saruman the wizard in Lord of the Rings lust for power and glory brings himself to ruin. Think of the Joker in Batman turned in on himself.

[11:40] Every story has a villain. And there in the palaces of heaven in the courtyards of happiness and glory unstained the devil turns on his maker.

Through treachery and deceit one third of the angels rise up against their sovereign law and war is declared. And so evil enters the story. And it is staggering the naivety people live with regarding evil.

They don't take it seriously. And they live all their life as if there is no villain. And so when people think of the devil they think of him what?

Prancing around in red tights carrying a pitchfork at the Tour de France. But he is the incarnation of the worst enemy you've ever met in every story.

The scripture says he has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they do not take evil seriously. What will it take for evil to be taken seriously?

[12:52] The Holocaust? Child prostitution? Gang rape? People trafficking?

Life is very very confusing isn't it? If you will not take into account that there is a villain that you have an enemy? It's not a nice thing to think about is it?

It's one of the reasons why preachers don't preach on the devil. C.S. Lewis writes this one of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked so much about the dark power in the universe.

A mighty evil spirit who was held to be the power behind death disease and sin. Christianity thinks this dark power was created by God and was good when he was created and went wrong.

Christianity agrees this is a universe at war. Evil enters the stage. Point number two evil enters the world.

[14:03] Evil enters the world in time. Genesis 1 and 2 you know the story don't you? It's a beautiful world. It was good. It good. It was good. It was good. It's a world without shame.

A world without sin. A world without arguments. A world without sorrow. A world of joy and harmony. That's Genesis 1 and 2. You're in Genesis 4 and it's a world of murder and death of division and exile.

You're in Genesis 5 it's death and more death and more death. chapter 6 you have rebellion on a scale unparalleled that every inclination of man's heart was only evil all the time.

Genesis 7 and 8 there is a cataclysmic flood and Genesis 9 you have drunkenness and incest. Chapter 10 is ever spreading evil and in chapter 11 is outright rebellion a hostile bid to take over the world.

But where does it start? it starts in Genesis chapter 3 so can you come there with me? Genesis chapter 3 we're on familiar ground aren't we?

[15:16] It starts by saying that the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. The serpent is a created being.

Genesis chapter 12 and verse 9 sorry Revelation 12 and verse 9 and 20 verse 2 John describes the devil as that old serpent the devil. And so how does evil enter in?

Verse 1 did God really say did God really say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

First of all he overstates doesn't he? You shall not eat of any tree. What God had said to Adam and Eve is you can eat of all the trees except one.

Eve responds and she quotes God back to the devil but she misquotes him. She says we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden.

[16:28] That's right. Neither shall you touch it. That's not right. lest you die. God had not said anything about touching it. She kind of draws God's commands more restrictive than God had made them.

Verse four is the outright lie. You will not surely die. First he creates doubt and then he lies. God and then in verse five the serpent appeals to Adam and Eve in exactly the same way that he fell. Then verse five God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

What's behind that? God is keeping you back. God is holding out on you. You can be like God. You can be wiser than God.

You can be God. And you cannot minimise the enormity of Adam and Eve's sin. You cannot minimise the sheer ingratitude.

[17:48] How had God treated them in chapter one and two? He had given them everything they could need, everything they could want. He held nothing back from them. One of the things I find about Genesis 3 is the madness of sin.

When you go back to it, you can look at ideology and that's the right thing to do, but there's a madness to Eve and Adam's sin in Genesis 3. William Still says this, this parent sin is the sin of all sins, equaled only by that primal sin of Lucifer which stands out like a blot against the light of what God has made him.

It's important that we hold two things together here. These two things together, one is this essential deceiving nature of the devil who's always scheming, always plotting, his wiles always must be taken into account.

So we sinners, we never bear the blame alone for our sin. The other is the full responsibility of human beings for listening to voices which are completely contrary to knowledge and experience of God.

Satan's responsibility and man's responsibility go hand in hand. And this first sin of Adam and Eve is engineered by the devil with great ingenuity.

[19:15] Evil enters the stage, evil enters the world, and then lastly evil enters you. And the truth is this, that the problem of evil is not just out there on a macro level.

We can see it really clearly there, can't we? That evil is not only a problem in the world around us, but it's a problem in us. And the reason I want to say that is because the essence of the sin that the devil fell for and the essence of the sin that Adam and Eve fell for in the garden is exactly what you and I fall for every day.

That you can be the centre of your world. You can grasp at it. You can reach out and take it.

And that God is holding out on you. He's keeping you back. you need to be the main character. You need to be the main story. And to follow God means that you'll actually miss out.

And so we become preoccupied with ourselves. And our story, and our glory, and our beauty.

[20:35] And sin is to be caught up in oneself. when you look at group photographs, who is the first person you look for?

Alice Roosevelt Longworth describes her father, the US president, Theodore Roosevelt. She described him as someone who needed to be the centre of attention in any situation, whether joyous or sombre.

She wrote, my father wanted to be the corpse at every funeral, the bride at every wedding, and the baby at every christening. That was actually used to describe a minister to me this week.

But there's an element of all of us in that, isn't there? The corpse at every funeral, the bride at every wedding, the baby at every baptism. And so in this story, this great story, we are caught up into something bigger than our own rebellion.

And that is what Genesis 4 to 11 teaches us, isn't it? It is a death spiral where sin is not under control, but wonderfully, that is not the end of the story.

[21:59] I think in preparing this and trying to think about the origin of the devil, we are at the very limit of our understanding. There is a reason why the Bible isn't crystal clear on it, and that is because we are not meant to know. We are trying to grasp the ungraspable, we are trying to know the unknowable, and there are many questions, aren't there, in your heart and in my heart, about why does God allow the devil to exist?

Why did God create a world knowing that it would fall into sin? What we do know is this, with the advent of sin and the devil, you are able to grasp and understand something more of the love and the grace and the mercy and the holiness of God in a way that you would not have been had you stayed in that state of perfection.

Adam knew that God was loving, but he didn't know how loving. Adam knew that God was holy, but he didn't know how holy God is. Adam knew that God was gracious, but he didn't know how gracious.

We don't fully know the reasons for those questions. We are creatures that cannot fathom the ways of our creator, but we must humbly accept that this isn't the end of the story.

in Genesis 3, there's a lovely game of hide and seek. Answer me this, who is hiding and who is seeking?

[23:35] Is it God who's hiding? It's not, is it? Adam and Eve, in their shame and in their rebellion and in their embarrassment, they are the ones that so fig leaves on themselves, they hide. And God is the one who comes seeking.

And he says, where are you? It's one of the great questions in the Bible that God asks you, where are you? Wonderfully, the story of the Bible tells us, as we'll see in a couple of weeks, that there was one who came into this world who was not like Adam, was not like the devil, who was not proud, who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, who did not grasp, but willingly gave up.

And we're told gloriously, aren't we, in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 8, that the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil. And so tonight, as the people of God living in this story, we know that because of the cross of Jesus Christ, the devil is defeated, he is chained, the authority that he does have is very limited and his time is nearly up.

And ultimately, evil will be defeated and sin will be no more. Let's pray.

Let's pray.