
I

*The Only Explanation*¹

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. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

Genesis 3:8-9

In this third chapter of the book of Genesis we find ourselves face to face with one of the most important chapters of the Bible. It is one of those pivotal chapters because the doctrine which is there taught is something which is an absolute essential to the understanding of the central message of this Book. The Bible is primarily the textbook of salvation; it is an account of God's way of saving men and women and this particular chapter is one which is an absolute necessity to an understanding of the whole biblical standpoint. More precisely, we can put it like this: the message of this third chapter of Genesis is the one above all others which tells us exactly why this world of ours is as it is tonight. It is the chapter which shows us why God's way of salvation has ever become necessary; it tells us what it was that went wrong with man and with the world and why the coming of the Son of God from heaven to earth became an absolute necessity. It is here, I say, that we are provided with the explanation.

Now this is a subject which should be of concern to every thoughtful person at this present time and it is, of course, one which is very frequently being discussed. The question is: Why are things as they are? What is the matter with our world? How have we come to this present position? Why are we in our present predicament? That is the question of all questions at the present time. The books, the journals and the articles are all dealing with

¹ Westminster Chapel, 17 January 1948.

it and we can listen to series of talks about it. It is the so-called problem of our time and it is a problem which if we take life and ourselves at all seriously we must inevitably face. Let us face this whole question as we study this chapter and especially this first recorded question that was ever put to a human being – ‘Adam, where art thou?’.

This is not a theoretical question. I do not propose that we just have an interesting discussion or a monologue as you may call it. We are not met to discuss this matter in an abstract manner; we are none of us in a position to indulge in such luxuries. We all heard the other day of a young man at the age of twenty cycling along a road and suddenly the end comes. We are all in that position; and in the midst of life we are in death. Therefore, we are really discussing ourselves and what is to be our ultimate destiny. In other words, while it is very interesting to talk about the state of the world, we must remember that the world is nothing but a collection of men and women just like ourselves, and the world is as it is because individuals are as they are. We must beware of this fatal tendency to isolate this something called the ‘world’ and forget that the world is but ourselves.

There are two points of view on the subject before us. There is the position which is expounded in this Book which we call the Bible, and there are all the other views, and all the other views in a sense can be summed up as a general belief in some evolutionary process. I do not want to go into this in detail tonight because I am concerned with a positive exposition, but I say that anybody that does not accept the biblical explanation of the state of the world and society tonight will be found to be holding the belief that the world has somehow evolved – that there was once a primitive form of life which has gradually evolved itself; man is undergoing a process of evolution and development and every generation finds him a little bit higher up the scale than he was before. As man is higher than the animal, so he is better than the generation before; we look back, therefore, and we believe that this process is taking man on to an ultimate perfection.

I just put it like this in a hurried word in passing. But is there anyone who still seriously can maintain that the present facts and the present position justify us in saying that man today is better and more advanced than he has ever been? that he is better

spiritually and morally? that he is a more perfect example of human being? Is there anyone facing the stark facts of today who would venture to put this forward? The tragedy is that we hold on to these ideas, these theories, in spite of the facts which confront us. We must rather, I say, turn to this explanation which the Bible gives of the present state of life. We can put in this form: it does not tell us everything in detail, but it does give us a key to the main problem and to an understanding of the essential situation. There are many things which are left unanswered. People are always asking, what is the origin of evil? And there is but one answer – We do not know. Someone may say, ‘Who is this serpent? How did he become what he became?’ You may say in reply that there was some kind of cosmic fall before the creation. All right, but still the question remains, How was even a cosmic fall possible? And there we answer, We do not know. We are face to face with a fact. We do not claim that the Bible gives an ultimate explanation of the origin of evil in a primary sense. No-one else can explain it. But it does give us an extraordinary explanation and one which I want to try to show you so fits the facts as to call for our most serious consideration. Let me summarise it like this:

The Bible tells us God made the world, he made man. He placed male and female in a position that can be described as paradise. There they lived and had communion with God. You get an idyllic picture. Then you come on and get this other picture which is provided in this third chapter. It tells us of life as it was and then shows us this picture of Adam and Eve hiding in their misery and wretchedness, trying to avoid God and get away from that Voice that followed them. It announces the curse that came upon the earth – that the woman should conceive in sorrow and pain and that the man should toil and eat in the sweat of his face – and we are told how thorns and thistles, disease and death came in. First life as God made it; then life as it has become. There is the whole answer, the whole explanation of the position which we are considering together.

But you notice the Bible goes beyond just painting the two pictures. It tells us *how* the first became the second. And there it introduces us to its doctrine of what is called sin. It tells us that because man did certain things he changed the whole situation, and that everything that you and I inherit tonight is because of that;

that the world is as it is tonight simply because of this self-same thing. The Bible's philosophy can be summed up under two main headings:

The first is that *man's troubles are in himself and not in his environment*. There you see is a fundamental postulate as far as the Bible is concerned. Now all those other views believe the exact opposite. They say that man himself is all right if only he were given a chance. That is why they are so interested in environment; they believe that if only conditions can be put right then mankind is going to be all right. Their essential belief is that the trouble is in man's environment. In the very beginning the Bible gives the lie direct to any such theories and ideas. It tells us that man started in a perfect environment; he had everything that can be desired; there was nothing lacking and yet it tells us that it was in that perfect paradise of a condition that man did something that turned his paradise into a wilderness. In its history the Bible constantly goes on illustrating this same theme. At times it seems almost ironical in its method of presenting it. We are given pictures of men who were the sons of most saintly fathers, who were taught the Word of God, who had everything that could be desired, but they turned out to be some of the worst characters that are depicted in these pages. The Bible says man's troubles are not in his conditions and circumstances, but in himself.

And the second heading is that *ultimately our troubles are due to a wrong relationship to God*. That is the great message of this chapter. Here I need not turn aside to point out that this is the big thing that is never faced in the modern world. If only the world realised this tonight, then, I say, we should have taken the first vital step in the right direction. Yet here we see it so plainly and clearly. It is because man went out of the right relationship with God that everything else began to go wrong.

This, then, is the biblical explanation of all our troubles. It says that they are all due to sin. It gives us that first tragic picture and its message is to tell us that the tragedy of the world is that man goes on repeating this mistake. Men and women, in spite of this revelation, still go on doing exactly and precisely what Adam and Eve did at the beginning. Man's tragedy is that he will not listen but turns a blind eye to history. The trouble of this story in Genesis chapter three is still being enacted.

Let us look at it in this way: there in that garden you see a man and a woman, miserable, unhappy, ashamed, realising that something vital has gone wrong and they hear the Voice, they hear God walking in the garden in the cool of the evening and he comes to them and asks 'Adam, where art thou?' At which they cower and hide. That in a sense is the epitome of the whole of the message of the Bible. Man is in his present state because of certain fundamental troubles. Here they are put very plainly before us. If we analyse what led Adam into his unhappy position, we shall discover what brings man into that position tonight. What are the reasons?

The first is surely this: *man's fatal belief that he knows what is best for himself*. Here is man, created by God, in a state of perfection and placed in perfect conditions and surroundings. Why did that not continue? Why does man find himself hiding amongst the trees, and having to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow and face pestilence and disease and death itself? What has gone wrong? The simple answer is that man believed that he knew better than God how to manage his own affairs. It is as simple as that. God put man in the garden and said, 'Now you just live life as I ask you to live it; I give you great liberty; but there is just this one prohibition.' God gave man law and told him that he would be happy and in communion with God, that he would reap the benefits of this glorious creation, he would never have to face difficulties or death – but you remember what happened. The temptation came to man in this form. It was put to him that God was thus limiting him, being unfair to him; that if he only believed it there was a much bigger kind of life available for him, and so he should disbelieve what God said and flout his law, and should take of the fruit of that particular tree and thereby he would obtain knowledge and information and he would become a god. There was a way of life superior to that which God had indicated! Man accepted the lie and the whole message of the Bible is just to tell us that misery, wretchedness and death and all the troubles of the world, individually and collectively, tonight result from that one thing – the disobedience and lawlessness of Adam and Eve, their refusal to live as God would have them live, and putting their own thoughts in the position of God's holy law.

That, my friend, sounds almost childish in its simplicity and yet

I ask you to ponder and consider whether that is not something which is most obvious in this world of ours tonight. Just think of the tremendous efforts that are being made individually, in gatherings, in groups, to discuss the social problem, the economic problem, the political problem; the whole world is asking what is the matter with the world; what can be done to put it right. I am not saying that men are not perfectly sincere but I am here to point out that in all the noise and talk and conference and discussion the one vital thing is never mentioned. The one thing that is never being considered is this: are all our troubles after all due to the fact that we are not living life as God told us to live it? Because we are not in the right relationship to God?

But, I am not here to discuss this problem in terms of the national or international situation, I am here to be urgent and serious in an individual sense and the question I put at this point is, therefore, just this: On what is your life based? Are you happy? Is all well? Are you free from any sense of shame? Can you say that you have not got a running sore in your soul? Are you not longing for something better? Do you not know within yourself that there is another kind of life? How otherwise do you explain the sense of shame? – of being shackled and fettered? Is there not something standing between you and a glorious life? – Do we not have a curious feeling within us that we were not meant for the kind of thing we are experiencing, but for something bigger – an inner cry for an ampler and diviner air?

Our trouble is we repeat this ancient error of Adam; instead of facing life in the light of this Book, we live according to man's ideas, we choose the philosophies of men which say that our troubles are in our environment. No, my trouble is that I have not been obeying the law of God. God has told me very plainly what he wants me to do in the Ten Commandments, in the moral law, in the Sermon on the Mount, in all the teaching of the Gospels and Epistles. It has been in the teaching of the church throughout the ages and the centuries, the call to live life in God's way. Now, I say, the question we should ask is, Am I doing my all, my everything, to live my life in God's way? For, according to the Bible, the initial cause of all our ills and troubles is this fatal idea that we know how to live life in a manner that is better than that which is indicated by God.

Let every man examine himself. When I face my working

philosophy of life – we have all got some sort of theory by which we live, some sort of an idea, even the most thoughtless person. Now, if I review my philosophy of life, this is the question: Can I say that I am basing my life solidly and squarely on what God has revealed as his idea for the life of man? It was because he ceased to do that that Adam found himself slinking away from God with that sense of shame and hiding amongst the trees.

The second reason for man's continuing troubles I can put in this form: it is *the refusal to face seriously the fact of judgment*. That, I think, is obvious from this story. You see God made the position so clear to man. Man is left without excuse at all. God said to him, 'You live in this garden; you can do all these things, *but* if you do the one thing prohibited judgment is certain.' As God had the right to do as the Creator of man, he placed him under law, made his announcement of judgment and, therefore, I say, man was without excuse at all. God has told man right from the beginning that he holds him responsible. God made man a responsible being because he gave him certain of his own qualities, made him able to understand the mind of God and for that reason he put him under law, he held him responsible and announced the fact of judgment. Why did man ever find himself in misery? How obvious is the answer! He did not take seriously the fact of judgment. The tempter came and said, 'You do not believe all that surely? Just listen to me and you will have a much better life. You need not be afraid of any consequences. God is only trying to frighten you. You do as I tell you, you will be perfectly happy and you will have this amazing knowledge and understanding; you will be like a god yourself.' Man believed it and the judgment descended and men and women have reaped the consequences ever since. But man goes on repeating his mistake; we get the same story later in the record of the Flood. There God began to warn the world, but the world ridiculed the message and thought it funny that there was going to be a judgment. Noah preached for over a hundred years, but man would not listen and so the judgment descended and the Flood came. Move on and you will see the same thing in Sodom and Gomorrah, although Lot pleaded with his contemporaries; judgment was announced and judgment came. It is the whole story of the Old Testament. God has announced judgment through his prophets and servants. He has said that 'the way of transgressors is

hard' (*Prov.* 13:15). 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked' (*Isa.* 57:21).

You are going to suffer if you do not listen to God. The children of Israel were told that as they entered Canaan but they refused to listen and judgment came. Read on further to the New Testament: John the Baptist went about preaching 'Repent or judgment will descend'. Jesus of Nazareth preached exactly the same message; for three years he warned the nation; he told them it was the last word. Remember the Parable of the Vineyard, how the owner of the vineyard sent his servants and they ill-treated them. Then, he said, I will send my one son; I will give them a last chance. 'They will reverence my son', but if they will not, then I will destroy them (*Mark* 12:1-9). How this Son warned them but the Jews would not listen. It was the old mistake. Then in A.D. 70 the Roman legionaries sacked everything; the nation was thrown out into the world and there she remains until this very night. That is the message of the Bible. You have got it, too, in your New Testament in the Book of Revelation. Believe in this, realise that judgment is a fact; listen before it is too late.

But, as I have said, it is all here in the third chapter of Genesis. This is a summary of the whole Bible for you and, put in individual and personal terms, it means something like this: God, though he is almighty and absolute and illimitable and infinite in power and majesty, knows us one by one. The next thing that is obvious is that God sees everything we do, he is omniscient; he is omnipresent. There is nothing we do but God sees it and knows all about it. Our every action is known to him. This Word of God, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews says, 'penetrates even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow' (*Heb.* 4:12). That is the One with whom we have to do. God is a discerner of the thoughts of the heart. Our every action is laid open to him.

'Surely nobody believes anything like that? My dear sir, you ought to have been preaching years ago! No-one believes that now.' I ask you, has God changed? Can you deny that he knows us one by one? Whether we believe it or not, this is the message of the Bible. A time is coming for certain in the life of every one of us when we shall suddenly hear a Voice, and this is what the Voice shall say, 'Adam, where art thou?' God, our Maker, will address us. The One who gave us our soul and put within us these amazing propensities

that we possess. He will speak my name and your name and what he will say is this: 'What have you done with the life I gave you? What has happened to the soul I placed within you? Adam, I gave you these great possibilities – Adam, where art thou? What have you done with yourself?' It was because he did not take seriously this doctrine of judgment that Adam found himself in misery and wretchedness, hiding and thrown out of the garden to meet briars and thorns. My dear friend, this is pivotal, central; God is announcing judgment still.

Can you explain these World Wars one after another in any other terms? Why is our world as it is in spite of all our wisdom and culture? Why are we failing so tragically? It is God telling man, 'While you live apart from me you shall not be happy'. God is announcing judgment even through contemporary history. Oh the tragic folly of refusing something which was announced so long ago and confirmed so often through the centuries.

You know the final tragedy is due to the fact that man turns away from God, instead of turning to him in his trouble and misery. In his folly man has put his own ideas in the place of God's and thought nothing of this idea of judgment; but when he begins to awake to the knowledge that something is wrong – when he hears the voice of God – then his instinct is to get away from him. This is the greatest tragedy of all. When man fell, when he began to feel he had done wrong and was filled with this sense of unworthiness, why was it that he did not seek God and make a friend of him? If only he had gone to God! If only he had cried 'God, I realise my folly, I have sinned against thee; I acknowledge it, wilt thou pardon me?' But no, once he had sinned he went away from God and when God called him his instinct was to go still further. That is the ultimate tragedy of man, that in the depth of his need and misery and shame he avoids the only One who can really help him.

Who can put man and his world right? It is my privilege to stand here tonight and tell you that, though man is guilty of this triple folly, God had pity on him, God came after him and God called unto him, not only to condemn him but to speak to him and to give him the gracious promise that, though he had thus wronged himself and ruined the world in which he had been placed, God was going to come into it. God was going to enter into the fight with evil and was going to be a conqueror. The promise of salvation

is announced – the serpent's head will be bruised! In his tenderness God clothed them in their nakedness and there gave an indication that the day would come when he would clothe them with the righteousness and the perfection of his own Son and receive them back to himself.

I say that this is the final tragedy – the folly of refusing to take the idea of judgment seriously. Here is the world tonight in its unhappiness – look at men and women; see how muddled and unhappy life has become. They are trying to find happiness in pleasure, they need something and the very thing they need is being offered and yet they turn away from God while he is speaking, from the only One who can bless.

Is there anyone, I wonder, who has been guilty of this tragic folly. If you are in this state of misery and unhappiness, I suggest that your trouble is that you will not listen to God. He is speaking to you. He has come after you. He has sent his Son to earth and he took your sin and bore it in his own body and bore it on Calvary's hill. He asks you to listen to him, to believe his message, to yield your life to him and he promises you that if you do so you will inherit greater blessings than your father Adam lost. Oh may God grant us grace to see our need that we must live our life as he dictates; and understanding that we know where we are going, to death and to judgment for certain, but, above all, that we shall hear the voice of God calling us to accept his free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ his Son.