

Today we begin Christ in the first five books, which is the Torah, the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

And today's message is entitled The Promise Begins. Verse 15 of chapter three is the text that we've chosen to represent all of the Book of Genesis. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. Adam and Eve have just disobeyed God.

And as part of death and sin entering creation for the first time, there is a promise from the Lord, a promise that holds in it the idea, the hope of rescue and redemption and restoration.

A promise that one day the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent and in so doing crush the head of evil. Genesis means birth, origin, beginning, come into being.

Genesis, it's the first book of the Bible and our fifth in the series that we have started, Christ in Scripture. Last week, Ben did an overview, tracing the story of the glory of God throughout 66 books.

We've done the first four, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and now we're in our fifth book.

We're looking for the types, the images of Christ that are found in Scripture that give us a fullness in our appreciation of his glorious being and what he has done as saviour of the world.

So if you're familiar with Genesis, it's full of types, isn't it? It is just probably, I think, the richest book of messianic type. So when we think of type, it's things like the ark.

Noah and the ark is a type of Christ. So anyone who's not in the ark gets destroyed. And so when we come to the end at Revelation and the Book of Revelation, the end of the world, if you're not in the ark, who is Christ, you're destroyed.

There's no second way to God's salvation. It's only through the ark and that's Jesus.

When Abraham takes his son, Isaac, the son of promise in Genesis 22 to Mount Moriah and he's ready to sacrifice the child, obviously it's a picture of the sacrificial son that will come, Jesus.

And what's another picture of Jesus in that little vignette, that story? Anyone want to yell it out? The lamb, the ram, the animal that is the substitute.

Isaac doesn't have to lose his life, but it's a picture of one day, there will be a much more important sacrificial substitution and it will be Jesus.

When Joseph, we wander our way through the dysfunctional family line of the people of Israel, chapter 20 to 12 to 50, we come to Joseph and he's a type of Christ. He's a saviour figure.

He saves all of Egypt and Israel, even though he is mistreated in his life. It's a life that points to the sovereign hand of God, doesn't it? God's sovereignty is seen in his life.

So there are many other little vignettes in the story of the Book of Genesis that point us to Jesus. Our focus today is this little one here, Genesis 3.15, the first promise of good news.

It's called the Proto Evangelium, Proto First Evangelium Good News. The first promise, the first time God said, okay, sin has entered the world and with it death, but I promise that I'll fix it. I'll fix the problem.

God promised that he would write it. He would return what was lost and renew all of creation by faith. So what was lost?

I guess this is revision for many of us. Innocence was lost. Purity was lost.

Relationship with God was lost. Intimate, trusting relationship was lost. Guilt was gained.

Shame was veiled across humanity and all this happened after the disobedience. A curse was given to mankind and to the serpent. After that, what we heard read, and that is Genesis 3.15.

I'll read it again. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

So out of the whole Book of Genesis, why have we chosen this passage? It's because it's the first promise in all the Bible of the victory of grace, God's victory through the seed of the woman.

We have two parts in today's message. I think it's quite simple in a way. A promise to believe and a story to behold.

A promise to believe and a story to behold. The promise at its most literal, the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head, but there will be enmity between your offspring. At a very practical level, I would say that has come true.

Would you agree? I mean, raise your hand if you just love snakes. A few people, absolutely, a few people.

But I'd say on the whole, and I can testify to this, where we live at Mount Kohler, I've never had so many snakes into our property.

And whenever the red-bellied black snakes turn up, I'm not, I've learned to be okay with them, but I'm not okay with them.

It's sort of a thing when you have a decent size red-bellied black in you, not in your house, but in the garage and in the backyard. What God said is probably true, from the offspring of the woman to the offspring of the serpent.

There's a little bit of enmity, but of course, it's more than just the physical. The serpent represents evil. Revelation 12.9 says, The great dragon was hurled down that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.

He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him. The devil, Satan, which means accuser of the brethren, is also known as a serpent. So it's completely acceptable to read, Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden.

But what does it mean to say the devil's offspring? Because that's what the curse is, the serpent's offspring. Does the devil have offspring?

You ever thought about that? Who are the offspring of the serpent or of the devil? Well, Jesus calls the children of the pharisees, children of your father, the devil, offspring of the devil, John 8, 44.

Those who do the works of the devil, who do evil, are the children of evil, children of the devil. 1 John 3, 8 says, The one who does what is sinful is of the devil.

It seems that in Genesis 3, 15, there are two families developing, two lines, the line of the woman of faith and the line of the serpent, which is rebellion. And it's immediately manifest in the story line.

Cain commits violence, murdering his brother. He's of rebellion, of the line of the serpent. And Seth is said to call on the name of the Lord in faith.

He's of the faith of the woman. He's of rebellion, the seed of the woman. So the promise is the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's head, even though bitten on the heel.

So the devil, it would seem, strikes the heel of Jesus, the seed of the woman, at the cross. But Jesus crushes his head in victory, the victory of the resurrection. So the offspring of the serpent refers to Satan and his works.

Sin and death, the powers opposed to God. And the offspring of the woman culminate in the Lord Jesus. All in agreement say aye, all against.

So I think it's sort of pretty obvious in a way. Interestingly, we live on the other side of that promise being fulfilled, don't we?

So all the way through the Old Testament, you can see this promise is holding people in faith, bolstering them when evil is winning.

There's this promise, a scarlet thread throughout the big story of the Bible, saying, a day will come when evil is crushed. But we live on the other side of the seed of the woman crushing the serpent's head.

And well, firstly, do you believe, do you believe the promise was fulfilled? It's a bit of a captive audience. We're leaning into that, I think, as a church.

The fact that you're here probably says that, yeah, we do believe that Jesus was the seed of the woman. And he crushes and crushed the serpent's head. Was it complete?

Well, yes and not completely. We talk a lot about the now and not yet, don't we? It seems like Jesus has dealt a fatal blow on the serpent.

But as Romans 16 says, the church continues to crush the serpent's head until Jesus returns and wraps everything up in this world.

So the now and not yet is somewhat confusing, but we could say we're pretty clear on the fact that the promise was fulfilled. Praise God. And what do we take from that?

God's good for his promises. Amen? You can bank them.

He said he'd do it and he did. I think that leads us to, there's a promise to believe and a story to behold. A story to behold.

I would put it to you that under the Shekinah glory of God, there is nothing more important than story. What do I mean by that?

Well, the Shekinah glory is that static, glorious, light, energy that is coming from God, that makes people fall to the ground. The Shekinah glory.

I can't imagine, as I read the Bible, there's anything more important in the universe than the glory being emitted from the being of God. Amen? But I would say just below that is story.

And I'm open to feedback and pushback. I've been hunting around recently the last month, getting feedback from people about this idea. It's not any story.

It's not any story. It's a God story about what he's like. But I think that's the very next most important thing in the universe to the Shekinah glory of the being of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Story is immensely important. And once we understand that, it sort of means something for us. In our Life Hub last week, or the week before actually, we were looking at Genesis 3.15.

And someone raised the question, which I think is a natural context question, did God know that Adam and Eve would sin? Did God put the snake in the garden? Why did God put the snake in the garden if he did?

Did God get shocked when Adam and Eve have disobeyed and sinned? If God knew that they would sin, how could he plan a story that involved so much human carnage and misery, so much suffering?

We can shoot back answers quickly, but it is a difficult question. What's that serpent doing in a good garden? And did God know?

Well, he made everything. Why? And you know, you think about some of the pain that has been experienced by humanity in this history of time on earth, it's a profoundly deep, challenging question.

Why would he plan a story that's so painful? We had some good answers, I think.

The first answer that is very helpful is Revelation 13 says, all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

In other translations, it says the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. So Revelation tells us that the Lamb, Jesus, the Word of God was destined to be a sacrificial lamb. He was, Jesus was destined to be a hero before Genesis 1.

He was always going to live such a life in a storied form that he would explain to humanity what God is like and knowing what God is truly like is the best way we can glorify him. And he needs to be glorified. So that's number one.

It would seem the Bible does say Jesus was the lamb slain before the creation of the world. Secondly, someone came up with in our discussion, well, you need to have free will to have love that's truly love. Anyone agree with that answer?

Yeah, I mean, it's a great answer. It's like, well, God doesn't want us to be robots, so he gives us free choice. And in having free choice, you always have the capacity to choose badly.

And so that's why you have sin. It doesn't explain why the serpent was there, but I guess there was always an opportunity to not obey God with the instruction about the fruit.

So free will, I think that's really powerful, but the one downside to the free will argument of why the serpent's there is in the end, when Jesus returns and all is resurrected to judgment or eternal life and heaven and earth are joined together and

it's called the new earth, new creation, eternal life. Is there free will there, the power of contrary choice? And the answer is no.

So in the end, the end state of humanity, what we might call heaven, but it's really heaven and the new earth, physical, not floating around with wings in a spirit form, a resurrected physical new body on a new earth, there is no power of contrary

choice. Isn't that a wonderful thought? Is it? Some of us think, well, how could it be great without free will?

It is. The train on a track never says, I wish I could just go out in the paddock without a train track. The train goes, give me some track and I'll pin my ears back and run.

I'll do my, because that's what we're designed to do, right? As humans, to live without the power of contrary choice and just, and God says in the New Creation, do anything you want. It's all good.

In fact, be creative. So that leaves us with another question. Okay, well, what is the answer?

Why would he have a serpent there? I think we need to take a different angle. Light.

Sometimes we talk about light, and I often talk about the fact that light needs time and space, and I start getting vague looks looking back. Light enables us to see the glory of creation, doesn't it?

If there's no light, you don't get to see what God made, which doesn't allow us to truly see general revelation and give the glory back to him. So light is really important so that we see what God has done, so we understand what life is about.

But life needs time and space, doesn't it? It's a wave. When we sit out in a campfire and we look at the stars, every star is telling us a story, isn't it?

It's coming from the Milky Way way out, sometimes millions of years that light has been coming.

And so when we see it and we're telling campfire stories, we look at that star and that star and that star, that star is telling me maybe a multi-million year old story. It takes time for light to get to us. So what's important about that?

Well, it's just a reminder that life is not lived in Polaroid snaps. It's not just like if I want to know about Alex, I don't just have a picture of him. I need to know his story, don't I?

I need to get the three-dimensional aspect, the time and space version of him. How do we experience the love of God? Is it by downloading a bunch of theological truths?

Is it by looking at a picture of him, a static picture? Doesn't seem like that's what he has chosen. He has chosen to reveal his love and his character through story.

The Bible starts with in the beginning. What does it sound like to you? Once upon a time, in the beginning, God could have done anything in the first book.

What do you find from chapter 12 to 50? A really haggard, chaotic story of family dysfunction. And God is weaving his big story of promise and redemption into real people.

Now, you do have Moses finding God in the bush. And he's like, who are you? And he says, I am that I am.

That's a bit more Polaroid. That's more like, I just am, mate. Here's me, shekinah glory.

But then very quickly, what does God do? He says, and by the way, I'm a God who is loving and compassionate to the thousandth generation story. And I will punish people to the third and fourth generation story.

God reveals himself through story. The story of his son coming as the saviour of the world is the most important story there is. And so this brings us back to the garden.

Why would God allow a serpent to be in there? Because he's writing a story, plain and not so simple. The fact that there are very dark patches in this story of his glory, the fact that story involves suffering is mysterious.

It is, it's just mysterious. But there's a serpent in the garden because God is writing a story, his story. And God is the greatest artist, author, poet, designer there could ever be.

And I would put it to you that God has simply, sovereignly chosen to communicate the story of his glory, the story of Jesus on a canvas of suffering and even death, of joy and goodness and heroism and friendship and love and betrayal.

What if it's not an accident that his story is filled with hard parts and joyful parts and light parts and dark parts? God's story is intriguing, multifaceted, heartbreaking and most of all highlights how much he loves the world through his son.

Amen. Remember Jesus, he said about the forgiven woman. She loved much because she had been loved in the midst of story.

She'd been loved. He who has been forgiven much, appreciates their own story and then can listen and truly hear another person's story. I get pushback when I say this line, story is king.

Not more than Jesus, Jesus is king. But story matters. In fact, it's like right up there, right up there, close to the Shekinah glory of God.

So what does this mean? I want to say to you with encouragement, if you have suffered in your life, there's nothing that can sugar coat that reality, but it is your story.

It is in your story that there will be grace and mercy that you can find, amen? And the resilience that is in there, and the blessing and the hard work and the intrigue is because God is interested in our story.

And story is something fascinating to think about.

We had a course on Tuesday that was a really special time called One Meaningful Life, and at that course we talked about, I have a me story, a we story, and a the story, and for meaning in life, I need all three to be working.

My me story is more about my own personal journey and my agency, but if I don't belong, if I don't have a we story, things aren't as good as they could be.

That people that have agency and a me story and they have a we story, they belong, they're in a club, they're in a decent sort of social setting, but if you haven't connected with a transcendent the story, you are lacking, amen?

Story, your story matters. Why? Because God has revealed himself in story.

The meta narrative is God's story, his story. You know that, that history is his story. It's not simple, because there's a serpent in the garden of the story God wrote.

There's a serpent there. Romans 8 verse 18 says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing. My son-in-law made the most incredible pizza the other day.

I think I'm still suffering from the need for water from his homemade pizza. Paul says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing. So we have suffering in our life.

And if you hear what I just said, that that suffering is part of the story of God's glory, you might go, that's a bit rich, mate. I'm not accepting that God had anything to do with this pain, this sin.

But then the text goes on and says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us as the story unfolds. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Suffering is part of our story. Amen. And we can reframe it.

We can reclaim it by God's grace. Just as the son of God went to the cross for the joy set before him, remember Hebrews says that, we don't get an easy run in life, but we can accept the challenging seasons and the stellar successes.

I think much more easily when we realise it's a story. It's my story. Again, I would put it to you tentatively, gently, soberly and carefully.

God allowed the snake in the garden because they needed to be an antagonist in his story to set up the heroism of his son. And that means that you and I experience sin and pain and suffering.

We also, in a complex way, in Adam, fell and deserved the judgment, don't we? No, God didn't do it to us. But he wrote a story that would involve humanity falling and a hero in his son coming to save us.

It is now and not yet. The serpent still bruises the seed's heel. We get bruised.

But Romans 16 says, The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. We know in Christ we are on the victor's side.

And that means that we can play a role by the power of the name of Jesus in seeing evil crushed. We really can. Story, what do you reckon?

I think I've been doing this stuff for a long time, studying the Bible, preaching 30 something years. There aren't too many more important things than that, what I just said. If that's run off you and you haven't got it, okay.

God's revelation is for different timings. But I would submit to you, there's something really big in this.

If we get that story matters because that's the way God decided to express his character and identity, and he did over a long period of time, patience is required.

How important is it for us to not just walk through life forgetting about what's behind us? We need to stop and look back and reflect on our amazing life, don't we? And look back with eyes to see where was God in my story?

I'm gonna tell people about that. Maybe that, looking back on my life, maybe that's the best thing you could ever do with your life, amen?

Look back on it, and when God gives you an appropriate opportunity, say, can I tell you a bit about what God did in my life? And in my father's life and my mom and my grandparents, like, he's the God who loves to 1,000th generation.

He's into story, and I think when we get this and we reframe life, life is not a Polaroid. There are seasons that take weeks, months, years. Who knows that?

Can we tell each other this? Because we need to hear it. When things are tough, to walk with that person and say, I wonder what God's up to.

He hasn't abandoned you. His story remains the same. His promise is true.

Keep trusting in him. A promise to believe that God would do something about evil. He has done it, and he will continue to do it until Jesus returns.

And there is a story to behold, and we want to behold it with open eyes and gasped, open mouth, and wow, and I get to be part of it. I wonder, could we close our eyes, and I'll just pray a blessing over us as we move towards the communion table.

May you believe the promise spoken in the garden, that the serpent's head has been crushed by Christ. May you stand firm in the victory already won, even as you wait for its final unveiling.

May you know that your story is not random, but held within the greatest story of God's glory. May you find courage in seasons of suffering and gratitude in seasons of joy. May you see Christ in Scripture and Christ at work in your own life.

May you crush what must be crushed. Sin, accusation, despair by the grace of the Lord Jesus. May you walk in freedom as sons and daughters of the promise.

May the God of peace soon crush Satan under your feet. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.