

Community Broken

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Date: 12 May 2013

Preacher: Michael Ramsden

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's a pleasure for me to be here with you. As you can see, I don't have a Texan accent, but I would like to Tobin know I have been to Texas twice now. On my first visit I was presented with a Stetson hat, and on my second visit I was actually presented with an authentic handmade pair of cowboy boots. And so should I ever come back here again, I'll bring both with me and I'll air them while presenting the message.

This is obviously a special day both for those who are going to be baptized and also because you're celebrating Mother's Day here. It seems that Hong Kong has somehow fallen into the US pattern of having Mother's Day on this day, which just goes to show how far British influence has waned in the world. But it's good to be here now for my second Mother's Day actually of this year, and happy Mother's Day to you all. As I was preparing this message I was reminded of a very well-known story of an Anglican bishop in England who on Mother's Day in the UK was asked to make a short national radio address on BBC Radio 4 to the nation. And it was a message that he was really struggling to pull together, only had five minutes and he was thinking, what am I going to say in five minutes? How am I going to somehow communicate something meaningful? And he was still struggling. As a matter of fact, on the day of the broadcast he woke up that morning, he was meant to be broadcasting live that afternoon, he still didn't know what to say. And then he suddenly remembered that actually not very far from him there was actually a very large and popular church and the preacher there was rumored to be remarkably insightful and engaging. And he thought, you know what, I'll go and listen to what he has to say and maybe I can, I'm going to learn something that maybe I could use this afternoon.

So he goes and sits in the back of this church and as the pastor comes up to the front to preach to the congregation, he comes up to the podium and to the pulpit and looks out into the congregation and these were his opening words. He said, this morning I found myself in the embrace of a woman who was not my wife. And the church went absolutely silent, you could almost hear an intake of, and then he leant forward and he said, it was my mother. And everybody went, ah, you know, people broke out into applause and they laughed and the bishop sitting in the back thinking, this, this is perfect. So he immediately, he rushes back, you know, just at the end of that, he skips lunch, he's hastily trying to work a message around this opening illustration and he's, then all of a sudden he realizes he's running late, he grabs his note, he grabs his case, he jumps in his car, he drives where the radio station is, he gets caught up in traffic, he's sweating, he's panicking, he runs into the radio station, they see him, they grab him, they usher him, they stick him straight down in the booth and as he sits down in the chair, the green light comes on and now he knows he's live.

And so he's reaching down into his case to get his notes and so he, but he has to speak, there can't just be silence. So he starts with the story and he says, this morning I found myself in the embrace of a woman who was not my wife. And then he just drew a blank. He was panicking, he's looking for his notes, he's, and then he can't find his notes and he's realized he's left them back at home. And he leans forward and just put his heads in his hands and says, but for the life of me I can't remember who it was.

Anyway, the reason I was reminded of that story is I woke up this morning and realized that the notes I needed for this particular message I had left back in the UK. And so, but nevermind, they probably weren't any good anyway. So let's dig in into where I've been asked to speak this Sunday, particularly about the issue of the fall. And if you're not convinced that you are fallen, if you're not convinced that you are not perfect, if you are not convinced that actually maybe there are some things in your life that need changing and are wrong, then very clearly you are not speaking to your mother. Now this question of the fall, and this is coming in a series, Tobin's kicked this off.

[4 : 07] So if you're visiting just here today, just to put this in context so it doesn't come to bolt out of the blue, what was said last Sunday was actually very, very important, just in terms of what it means to be created in the image of God, because that's really where this story starts in terms of the human story, that it starts off very, very well, which is why that bit of reading from Genesis 1 is so important. The idea that this loving God creates this world, he puts us in it, he loves us, he creates us for community and for purpose, and at the end of all that he's created he looks at it and he says, this is very good. Now the thing though is when we look around at the world today, we wouldn't say this is very good. As a matter of fact, it seems to be very, very mixed. And sometimes the Christian gospel is, and Christians in particular, feel very misunderstood on this point, and indeed you may feel if you're looking at the Christian faith from the outside, that the Christian message seems very confused on this point. Are people good, or are they bad? And it seems that sometimes they meet with Christians and they hear all this amazing stuff about being created in God's image, and it appears that actually to be human is a really great thing and a very fantastic thing and a very sacred thing. And then they hear other messages and it sounds like to be a human being is a very, very bad thing and it's a terrible thing and so on.

How do we understand this tension? How do we actually hold it together? Now even just from simple observation, we can see both the good and bad, even simply just by observing humans and maybe even looking into our own life. I can remember about a year ago, I was going away on a trip and my eldest daughter Lucy said to me, Daddy, I want you to be prepared, because when I come home I'm going to have my hair cut. And she'd grown her hair all the way down to the small of her back and she happens to know that I like long hair and so she said, I just want you to be prepared.

So, you know, I come back six days later and the hair is now all the way up to here. And I walk in and I was like, hi. And I'm thinking, why, you know, this is quite a radical change.

And so a few days later I'm talking to her and I said, just why did you decide to have your hair cut? Just out of interest. And then she just begins telling me that in one of her classes they'd been doing some simple biology and they began just talking about cell reproduction and then also what can go wrong in cell reproduction and also cancer. And she'd got online and she'd found out more and read about cancer and especially was struck about how young children can also be struck by cancer and what that means for them. And so she did some more research online and she found a small charity which basically makes wigs for girls under the age of seven who've had to have aggressive cancer treatment and have lost all their hair. And as she read this, she thought what she would like to do is donate her hair to this charity so they could weave it together to make a wig. And so she had her hair washed and conditioned and put into four different plaits and then had them cut off and mailed them off to this charity so they could be made for wigs for these young girls. And as she's telling me the story, I'm listening to her and I'm reminded of a line from the book Little Women that's also in most of the films where a girl cuts off her hair so her mother can buy a train ticket and the mother looks at her daughter and says, your hair will grow back but you'll never be more beautiful to me than you are right now. And you can, we see and observe this kind of behaviour in people and there is something which inspires us about it and reaches deep. And I can remember, she's telling me the story,

I'm trying to think, okay I'm not going to cry now, I'm not going to cry. And you're so moved. And another time, we can also look into ourselves and we can see that there does seem to be something going wrong. Many, many years ago I was having my hair cut and I fell into conversation with the hairdresser and we're just talking about life and purpose and meaning and she starts asking all of these kinds of questions. And then she was very pregnant at the time and as we're talking she just says to me, Michael, I'm bringing a baby into a world but I'm so worried about bringing a baby into a world which is filled with so much evil. And as I'm listening to her, I just said using a line I'd actually heard from someone else, I know there's a lot of evil out there but what about the evil we see in here? And then she said, you know if there's a way to overcome evil in the human heart that would be amazing. And I said, oh it's interesting that you say that. I said, you know the Bible talks about sin and sin isn't just something that we do, it also describes the state that we are, we are sinful, we're aware there's something wrong within us. And she said, I know what you mean, she said, I want to be a better person but I can't. I feel like there's a power at work in my life that I can't change and I need someone to rescue me. And so I looked at her in the mirror because she's standing behind me cutting my hair and I said, what you're telling me is you need a savior.

[8 : 45] And I'm not joking, she said, ooh that's a very good word. Because in the English language you don't normally use that word savior anymore, you know, unless you go to church you're not going to hear it. She just went, ooh that's a good word. And so one of the questions we'll be looking at and what Genesis 3 does here is give us an insight into what's going on. Now at a more profound level, this conversation is also now happening within our culture right now, but in a much deeper way.

I was speaking to a group of doctors yesterday and I won't repeat everything that I said there here today, but you will find that there are some writers right now who will say, look we are basically becoming gods. Our technology, our understanding of evolution, the fact that we can maybe begin to re-genetically engineer ourselves, what's called the transhumanism movement, we ourselves can become gods. And we are now like the gods and there's this very, very positive view and everything's getting better and we're becoming more powerful and this is now charting the course for history.

And at another same time you have some of the world's most prominent atheists who are basically saying no, this is, actually this is completely mistaken. One of the people who most strongly refutes this particular idea is a guy called Professor John Gray. Now there are two professors John Gray, okay, there's one who wrote a book called Men Are From Mars, Women Are For Venus.

On Mother's Day, reading that book may not be a bad idea. It could help you understand a lot, but that's not that gray. This is a different gray who was the professor of historical, of political, professor of the history of political thought at the London School for Economics, which is one of the most prestigious chairs in the world in that field of political theory, in which he basically said this is all rubbish, this idea. He says this idea that we're getting better and better and better. He says all you need to do is study history and to see how we treat each other to realize that this is a myth. Now he says Christians can be forgiven for believing there's something special about being human because Christians believe we were created in God's image.

So we can understand why Christians have this myth and this false belief that there is something special about being human and why they talk about human rights and human dignity and the sacredness of life and all this kind of stuff. He says, but that is rubbish. He says, as a scientist, as an atheist, we know that we are all animals and we are just like the animal kingdom and we need to actually accept that fact. And in the animal kingdom, there is no such thing as rights and dignity and sacredness. The strong prey on the weak. And basically his book, *Straw Dogs*, which has now sold millions and millions of copies and been translated into dozens of different languages, is basically a plea to say we need to get away from humanism. Humanism is just the Christian faith dressed up in non-Christian words. It has no scientific basis whatsoever. There is no such thing as human rights. There's no such thing as human dignity. There's no such thing as human meaning. There's no such thing as human purpose because there's no such thing as human. All of these things are myths. We live in a world where the strong prey on the weak. That's the way it is. We are animals and we need a political and economic theory that is married to this scientific truth. We are animals and the strong prey on the weak.

[11 : 38] And unless we reject the Christian faith and the humanism that it has given birth to, and unless those of us who have huge military power dominate those who do not and make them our servants, people will come and dominate us. And so in academia right now, you see these two opposite pulling forces. One saying we are becoming like gods and we can make ourselves into gods.

And the other one basically saying, no, no, no, we're just animals. Now, what's interesting is you get into the Christian story and as you read through Genesis, we get some fascinating insight into that. And that's what I want to spend some time looking at with you now. Now, of course, this particular chapter of Genesis, particularly chapter three, is often considered to be a very light and silly little story, okay? Where basically, you know, we have this sort of mythical idea and it's a very, very simple thing and actually it's a bit embarrassing. So what I'd like to do is just look at it a bit more deeply with you. So just moving from what happened last Sunday, the idea that we are created in the image of God, we now come into Genesis chapter three where things begin to go wrong. And the first thing that happens is that human beings are tempted to start either disbelieving God or changing what God has said. They now come encounter with a different spiritual force, okay? This fallen angel who now manifests himself and speaks to them and basically says, look, has God really said you can't do anything in this place he has put you? Now, in Genesis one, if you've been reading it, after God, and you go into Genesis two, after God creates men and women, he says to them, you are free to go anywhere in the garden. You can go anywhere, you can do anything, okay? This is yours. There's only one thing you cannot do, right? And then the serpent comes along and he says, has God really said you cannot touch anything here? And the woman looks at him and says, well, actually, no, that's not true. So she takes this now total prohibition, but she now adds something into it. She says, well, we are allowed to sort of, you know, enjoy the garden, eat from its fruit, but we cannot eat from this particular place, nor can we touch this tree or we will die. Now, God actually never said that in the first place. It's interesting how the prohibitions get bigger and bigger in the minds of the people as they go through, because she says, we cannot eat it, nor can we touch it. Now, God never actually said that. He said, this is the one thing you cannot do. Now, if they wanted to, they could have put a rope swing in the branches and swung from the tree if they wanted to. Touching it isn't the problem, right? But she begins to sort of add to what is not permitted. And he said, and she says, we can't touch it or we will die. Now, here's where most people now struggle with this story. Adam and Eve eat the fruit and they don't die.

Do you notice that? Eve doesn't eat the fruit and go... As a matter of fact, and this may tell you something about the fact that Adam and Eve's relationship may already have some issues, it seems that Adam's sitting next to her watching her eat this fruit to see what happens. And there she is eating away and seems to be okay.

So, what happens? Well, God, after He's put them in the garden and given them this, given them community, He's given them an ecology, He's given them a vocation, He's given them all of these things. Now, all of a sudden, they decide that actually they know better than God Himself.

And they're tempted by the immediate. And they see that this is desirable, seems to be good for food, it's a pleasure to look at, it seems to be desirable for gaining a certain type of wisdom.

[15 : 24] And so they both eat it. But now just watch what happens when the first human beings decide they'll turn their back on God and actually try to do things their way as opposed to God's way.

The first thing that we read happen after they take the fruit is that they cover themselves up. Adam and Eve are no longer happy with the way they are. A form of psychological internal alienation sets in within them. They are no longer happy with the way they are. They feel ashamed, they're aware of their state, they're not happy, and they cover themselves up.

The next thing that happens is that God comes into the garden, and the one who they would have once run to and loved to spend time with and conversed with and chatted to and had a relationship with, as they hear God now coming, they run and hide.

Spiritual alienation kicks in. There is now an alienation between them and God. The voice that once would have brought pleasure and delight now causes them to go and just bury themselves. Then God basically says, where are you? Now, He's not asking this question out of ignorance.

As a matter of fact, this question is a very, very interesting question because when we ask, if you ask someone who you are in relationship with you, where are you right now? And you're talking to them, they're in front of you.

[16 : 42] You don't mean, oh, I can't see you. Where are you? You're basically saying, where are we in this relationship? Does that make sense? And every couple of times, and especially when you're going out, at some point you ask that question.

Well, where are we right now? And God comes in and says, guys, where are you? And now, we now see the next alienation comes in. Basically, well, the way people have traditionally said this, and I'm going to have to just correct this in a minute, is, well, look, Adam blames Eve.

Eve blames the serpent, and as they say, the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. But that's not quite correct if we look at this chapter very, very carefully. God comes and says, where are you? And Adam basically says, okay, God, the woman who you gave me, she gave to me some food, and I ate it. Who's he blaming? God. God, this is your mess.

Okay? You created this, you gave her to me, and now look what has happened. It's your fault. God. So, he blames God, and he also blames Eve. And now, we see this social alienation kick in.

These relationships, this community that was created for love, and for community, and for intimacy, is now shattered. And we see this form of social alienation kicking in.

[18 : 10] Well, after all of this, God's judgment kicks in. And God passes judgment on all of those who were involved. Now, at this point, this is a part of the story that maybe even sometimes Christians feel a little bit, ooh, you know, was this an overreaction? Maybe God was having a bad hair day. You know, late night, hadn't had a good night's sleep, comes into the garden. Guys, what have you done? You know, all they've done, they've done something relatively minor, and all of a sudden, there's this massive overreaction. Now, all that tells us is that that's the way we're thinking, is that we may not have actually thought about this notion of sin carefully enough. Because sin destroys everything.

It makes us less than what we are, and ultimately even, and actually also at the same time, imprisons us, and also alienates us from one another. A few years ago, I had, I was, speaking in the United States, and this is before I'd been given the boots, but I think at that point, I had the hat. And while I was speaking, I was actually speaking in Memphis, and while I was there, someone said to me, Michael, you should really go to the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis.

Have you ever been there? I said, well, I've never been to Memphis, so I've never been. They said, well, we know the curator. I'll arrange some tickets. My father was with me. He says, why don't you go and have a look? And so my father and I, we went to the museum together, and it was a very strange experience because we park in this big car park, and we start walking past this motel to get to the entrance to the museum. And I'm walking past the motel, and I'm looking at it thinking, I recognize this place. I'm sure I've never been here before, but I recognize this building. I recognize the car park. It looks so familiar.

And then you suddenly realize that the motel you're looking at is the motel that Martin Luther King was standing on a balcony, was assassinated in. And the reason I recognize the motel is I've seen the pictures in the history books, so that's why I recognize it. And basically, they've kept the front of the motel, and around the back of it, they've created a Civil Rights Museum. And my father and I are walking through this museum, and there's one picture that stuck in my heart, my mind, more than any other. I'd actually missed it. I'd walked past this giant photograph, and I turned around to see where my father was, and I could see my father standing, looking at this picture, crying, just tears coming down his cheeks. And he's looking at a picture of a group of African-American men, black Americans, walking out of a rubbish collection point. I guess if you're American, trash collection, refuse collection. It's rubbish collection anyway, just so we're clear. And they're walking out of this inner line, and they're going on strike. And around their necks, each of them is carrying a big square sign. And on that square sign are written just four words, I am a man.

And here now, a group of men going on strike, not for higher wages or anything else. They're going on strike simply to be recognized as human beings. Sin begins to destroy who we are.

[21 : 25] And it doesn't just simply affect us, it affects the way we treat other people. And we often stop relating to people as people, and we start relating to people as objects. And the difference between a relationship between a person and a person is interpersonal relationships are marked by love, and they are personal. They are personal relationships by definition. But the relationship between you and an object isn't one of connection, it's one of consumption. Objects you consume for your own pleasure, and for your own need. And when we begin to view other people, not as people, but as objects, they cease to become people who we want to connect with. They actually become objects who we now want to consume and use. As a matter of fact, I was speaking yesterday, actually, was it two days ago, to a group of business guys for the Harvard Business School alumni group.

And it was very interesting, I gave this particular illustration. And I said, and if you work in the service industry right now, I said, and you are aware that people who come into your bank or into your hotel or whatever it is and start to treat you and your staff as objects, where you are basically there to be consumed by them to make them feel better about yourselves, you'll know the problems that this generates. And three quarters of the room started nodding their heads vigorously.

The depersonalizing, dehumanizing effect of sin is catastrophic. It destroys everything. It is the greatest single challenge we have. It explains why the world is the way it is. Why is a good world created by a good God now so horribly messed up? And the answer is, well, we've turned our backs on God. We have broken His laws. We have decided to do our own things, go our own way. This has had an impact on us. It impacts how we treat other people. It impacts how we relate with God. And the results are enormous. They alienate us from ourselves within.

They alienate us from God spiritually. They alienate us from other people socially. And then God pronounces judgment. And the results of that judgment are now that there's both now an ecological alienation. This world that was meant to be home for them now becomes hostile and they have to learn to tame it. And there's also a vocational alienation that sets in. Work becomes labor for both Adam and Eve, which is why it's no accident in the English language that we use the word labor, both for giving birth to children and also for the process of work. It comes back to the influence of actually the Bible, especially the King James translation of the Bible on the English language.

And now there's this sense of vocational alienation comes in where most people feel that work is a tax on their time. And as great and wonderful as children are too, it can sometimes feel that children are a tax on our time. And we're all looking forward to the time where actually we're on our own and we don't have to look after the kids and we don't have to work either. At that point, you often just find yourself, you know, the term is empty nesters. I'm sure you've heard about it.

[24 : 01] And on that point, sometimes husbands and wives realize actually they're not getting on too well either. And very often in many relationships, that becomes a huge crunch point in their own relationship. Genesis chapter 3, I'd like to suggest to you, is profound. And after this judgment pronounced by God, the final effect is physical degradation. They will grow old and they will die.

Not immediately, but slowly. Now we sometimes call these the five faces of death. Can you imagine a more comprehensive definition of death than this? Internal psychological alienation, spiritual alienation, social alienation, ecological alienation, vocational alienation, physical degradation.

This is the most comprehensive view of death you could possibly have. They did die that day. And they will now live with the consequences of that slowly over the next few years. That is the consequence of turning their back on God. I find this fascinating. When I first read Mary Shelley's book, Frankenstein, and Mary Shelley is a very famous atheist in the UK. Her father was actually a Church of England vicar. Then she grew up, completely repudiated her faith, denied it completely, and then went on to write Frankenstein, one of the most famous horror stories ever written. And it's interesting that it's a horror story. And at one point, she has this incredible, actually in chapters 13 and 16 in particular, these incredible conversations between the creation in Frankenstein and Dr. Frankenstein, who created this creature. So Frankenstein isn't the monster. Frankenstein is the doctor who creates this other being. And it's an amazing series. Now, I don't want to put too much weight on this because it is said that Mary Shelley was very high on drugs when she wrote this book.

Now, I don't know whether that's true or not. So I don't want to just say too much. But Mary Shelley, the atheist, what she does in her book, Frankenstein, is Dr. Frankenstein wants to create life. And he thinks he's found a secret, not to create life from scratch, but to put life back into a dead body. So he gets a dead body and he stitches it all up and he has to borrow various parts, you know, to sort of get a piece of final body that isn't, you know, too decomposed. So he has to get the head from one place and the body from another place and so on. And anyway, this being is lying on the table, the electricity passes through it and it pops back up into life. And it's this enormous, ugly being. So if it helps you to look at me at this point, then feel free to use me as a visual aid.

And, but it is also completely benign. The being is gentle, kind, loving and ugly. The trouble is, is wherever it goes, it's treated with hostility and hatred. Eventually, it's driven into hiding. The monster finds himself living outside a small woodcutter's hut and he wants to help the family in it. And he realizes that they need wood for the stove, wood for heating. They're very, very stretched. They're actually, one of the, a couple falls ill.

[26 : 59] So every night, the monster goes out into the wood, he gathers wood, he chops it up, he places it neatly outside the cottage. And every morning they wake up and they find all of this wood there.

It makes all the difference to them. And as they go out during the day, the monster goes into the cottage and starts borrowing the books, again, starts educating himself. Anyway, eventually they find the monster and they drive him out of the cottage there. They can't believe he's there. And just after that, the monster now confronts his creator. And Mary Shelley puts these words into the monster's mouth. The monster looks at, at Frankenstein and says, you know, when I first came into this world, I didn't understand why human beings needed a law, why they needed police, why they needed government.

I couldn't understand why human beings needed any of these things. But then I read your history and I read your literature and I saw how you treated one another. And my wonder ceased and I turned away in disgust and loathing. At one point to be human seemed to be everything which is noble and godlike. In another sense to be human seemed to be everything which was vicious and base.

All of this in the same heart. All I can conclude, the monster says, is that you were created in the image of something perfect and you've fallen away from it. Now that's exactly what Christians believe.

We were created in the image of that which was good and perfect and we've fallen away from it. One of the world's most famous neuropsychologists by the name of Oliver Sacks said this in his book Awakenings. I think it's around, gosh, I'm tired. I think it's page 23 or 26. My memory fails.

[28 : 33] But he says this. He says, all of us have a basic intuitive feeling that once we were whole and well, at ease, at peace, at home in this world, totally united with the grounds of our being, and somehow we lost this primal, happy, innocent state and fell into our sickness and suffering. We had something of infinite preciousness and beauty and we've lost it. We spend the rest of our lives searching for that which we have lost, hoping one day we'll suddenly find it. How do you like that? Hundreds of billions of dollars spent in psychological research. Hundred years of the discipline, we finally got as far as Genesis chapter 3.

Now it doesn't just end there. The incredible thing with this story is as you continue to read through the Bible, as you continue to go through this series with Tobin, is that this rebellion that we've taken ourselves away from God, where we now find ourselves fallen, broken, often at enmity with ourselves and enmity with others, and enmity with God himself, is actually gloriously resolved through the cross of Christ.

Because it is now the story that this God who created this world, who loves this world, who wants this world to be rescued, doesn't now just simply say, let's hit the reset button, wipe out the whole thing and start all over again. He says, let's rescue this world from the position it's now in. And this God now comes, you will read and find out later as you go through, comes into this world. And as he comes into this world, he himself eventually will take this fallenness onto himself on the cross. At the cross, Jesus Christ becomes sin for us. The sin that we carry, this fallen image that we have, this brokenness that we know, all of the consequences that deserves, and all of the ultimate punishment it finally needs. All of that eventually. God comes into this world in the person of Jesus Christ, and when he goes to the cross, he takes that on into himself.

And he pays the price. He conquers over it through his resurrection and that physical death, and he offers us a new life in him. And that's what it means to be Christian. Why do we need God? We need God because we have a condition within us that we cannot ourselves fix. This is not bad news.

If you go to a doctor and he tells you you're fine, and then two days later you die, you would be, well, you wouldn't be angry with the doctor, obviously you'd be dead. Okay? But those around you might be disappointed. But if you went to the doctor and the doctor said, you are very seriously ill, you are on the verge of death, but if we do this, we can save you. That news, you do not receive necessarily as bad news. You could now embrace him. I can remember one of my daughters falling very seriously ill. We didn't know what was wrong. We were almost embarrassed to go to the doctor because we couldn't quite figure out what the symptoms were. And we took them in and the doctor, I just said to the doctor, look, I'm embarrassed I'm here. And it was so funny because they looked so ill and we went to the doctors and they suddenly seemed to like spark up. Does that ever happen to you?

[31 : 28] And I'm sitting there thinking, oh, I'm going to get into trouble with the doctor. And I'm just saying, look, I'm really, really sorry and I probably shouldn't have come in. And, you know, they're looking so much better now, but honestly, you know, a couple of hours ago they looked utterly terrible. And, you know, there's probably nothing really, really wrong. And I just spoke like this for a while. And then after two minutes, the doctor just stopped me and they said, all the while you've been talking, I've been looking, I've been looking at your son's chest and it hasn't moved in two minutes. He says, your son has severe pneumonia. He picked up the phone, he rang the hospital, he said, I need an emergency admission immediately, hung up the phone. And then after he hung up the phone, he said, I guess I should just listen to the chest just to make sure. And he put the stethoscope on the chest, actually it was a female doctor. And she said, yeah, just as I thought, you need to go straight from here to the hospital, don't go home. Now that's a severe diagnosis. And actually, eventually what they had was quite an old disease. It was a bit like being told your son's got consumption. It's something you thought happened in the 18th century and then just sort of died away. And the next day I went back into that manna surgery and I gave the doctor this huge box of chocolates. And I said, thank you so much. Because I was just so grateful for the diagnosis that they just got it right, just straight out of the bat like that. I was just so grateful. And the diagnosis that God speaks over us isn't meant to be negative for us. It's meant to say, look, this is the situation you are in.

And this is where you are, but I can get you out of it. And that's what comes through the cross. And it's on the cross where Christ takes, if you like, this sickness of sin and the consequences of sin and the punishment that sin deserves into himself, that he then also makes it possible for us now to come into relationship with him. So let me just say one last thing about this and then I'll close. We've talked about how sin actually affects us, but what it also does, it affects our relationships, our community. Sin breaks community and relationship. All relationship is a function of trust. Your friendships are those with those that you feel you can trust, with those people who are around you. But if that trust is broken, if that trust is betrayed, the friendship is broken.

So one of the other effects that sin does is it breaks and destroys these relationships. And God, now, even though he wants relationship with us, finds that we have broken relationship with him. And he wants to see it restored. Now, the way you restore relationship is through forgiveness and through by saying sorry. If you have broken relationship with somebody and you want it restored, two things have to happen. Number one, the person who's done something wrong has to say, I'm sorry. Not, I'm sorry I hurt you, which is normally how husbands apologize to their wives.

But I'm sorry, which means I'm wrong and I shouldn't have done it. And if the person is willing to forgive and wants to forgive, as you apologize, you receive that forgiveness and the relationship comes back. It may even be stronger than it was before. And this loving God who wants relationship with us offers us not just a change of who we are, but also a restoration of this relationship.

Sometimes people think, look, how good do you have to be a Christian? And that's the wrong way of thinking about it. Imagine life is like a bookcase, okay? And on the top shelf, you have the world's greatest leaders. I mean, people who are world famous throughout history for being people who've done great things and we admire them. That's the top shelf. And then imagine on the shelf below that, there are great national leaders, people who are really admired and respected, but maybe not known outside of their country. Inside the country, they're famous. Outside the country, people may not know who they are. And on the shelf below that, you've got ordinary, decent, hardworking, trustworthy people.

[35 : 01] If you went on holiday, you'd give them the keys to your apartment to look after it. On the shelf below that, you've got people who live a little bit close to the edge or maybe just over the edge. Okay, they're fun to be with. They've got lots of funny stories to tell, but you would never give them the keys to your apartment under any conditions whatsoever. On the shelf below that, you've got bad people who lie, cheat, and steal. And on the shelf below that, you've got evil people. I mean, people who enjoy inflicting pain on other people, like dentists and that kind of people. And then I give you a pen and I say, right, how good do you have to be?

Where will you draw this line to decide who gets into heaven or not? Because most people are happy to say, look, if you're on the bottom shelf, if you enjoy inflicting evil on other people, you shouldn't be then.

What most of us do is we look at whatever shelf we're standing on and we draw the line there and say, okay, from this point up, it's all fine. But that's the wrong way of looking at it. God will draw a line.

But he will not draw his line of judgment this way. He will draw it this way. And it will run through the middle of the bookcase. On one side of that line will be people who have done wrong things, who are broken, who are fallen, who have been offered this offer of forgiveness and restoration from God and have said yes.

And on the other side of the line will be people who have fallen and broken and messed up and they've been offered this offer of forgiveness from God and they've said no. And there'll be people on both sides of that line down every single shelf.

[36 : 32] Because we all share a common humanity. We all find ourselves fallen. We are all broken. In that sense, we're all in the same boat. God is making everyone, everywhere, in every nation the same offer.

And the question is, will we respond to him? Will we say yes? Will we say yes?