

Lesson One

1. Line from O Holy Night

- **Long lay the world in sin and error pining...**

2. Scriptural approach

- When we open the Bible to the Book of Genesis, we are introduced to the world as it was originally created in its perfection. Literally, it was Paradise. We read about the creation in six days with the culmination being the formation of both man and woman in the image of God. Everything was wonderful. The earth was beautiful and Adam and Eve had an intimate relationship with God. Only two chapters later, however, everything fell apart – quickly and totally.
- When the serpent appears in Genesis 3, he entices both Eve and Adam into disobeying God which wreaks havoc on what was a sinless relationship. God has very strong words of disappointment for both Adam and Eve, but also condemnation for the serpent in his part of causing the temptation to sin. Eve is chastised, Adam is to be punished and the serpent is given a “life-sentence” of hatred between himself and all subsequent human beings. The lives of these three are forever changed. But they aren’t the only things being affected by sin.
- At Genesis 3:17-19, God is speaking directly to Adam and says the following: *“cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (NIV)*
- Did you catch that other casualty in verse 17? *The ground* was cursed because of Adam and Eve’s sin. *The ground*, was forever changed. In other words, creation itself was damaged. And not just in the Garden of Eden, but all creation was altered. The earth, the sun, the solar system, all the cosmos, forever changed by one human error. Need more evidence about the long-lasting effects of sin?
- Move forward several thousand years to the time of the apostle, Paul. In his letter to the church in Rome Paul writes this: *“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Romans 8:22, NIV)*. From Paul’s perspective, nothing has changed with regards to the world. Humans are still living in their sinful nature and even the creation is still broken from its original perfection. Paul is able to look *forward* to a time when everything will be re-created, but until then, humanity lives in a creation that is broken, spoiled and groaning.

3. Pastoral approach

- How embarrassing that must have been for Adam and Eve? They had it all, really. Perfect life in Paradise. Perfect relationship with God and nature. Perfect relationship with each other. Perfect, perfect, perfect. Then it all fell apart.
- Keep going. Not only were they tossed out of Eden never to return, but their first two sons did not have the perfect relationship either. Cain kills Abel because God liked Abel's offering better than Cain's. Cain leaves the family and heads out to parts unknown.
- Keep going. In Noah's day humanity had become so sinful that God decided to wipe it out with the exception of Noah's family and the animals they rescued.
- Keep going and going and going. The brokenness caused by human sin was evidenced with Abraham, Moses, David, the whole nation of Israel at times. Creation underwent plagues, famines, earthquakes, you name it. All because of that original sin.
- The people kept crying out "*How long, O Lord?*" They had been told that God had a plan to redeem Israel, in fact, to redeem creation, through a Messiah. But who was this promised Messiah? And when would he show up? Would he be a great prophet? A mighty warrior? A wise king?
- When the Messiah did show up in the person of Jesus, not many people were still watching for him. Life was hard, you got used to it. Enemies invaded, you prayed for restoration. And God restored, but then came more sinfulness, more unfaithfulness and thus more brokenness.
- By the time of Paul, many had accepted that Jesus was that long-awaited Messiah, but the brokenness of humanity and creation still seemed prevalent everywhere.
- After 2000 years what has changed? Many people would say 'Not much'. There continue to be wars, famines, droughts, plagues and floods. Crime is rampant, economics are tough on most people, and the creation itself is undergoing deforestation, overfishing, and other destruction either caused by humans or just part of the natural cycle.
- It seems the world is still *in sin and error pining*. We recognize that we are a sinful people in need of a Savior, whom we have in Jesus Christ. By his life, death and resurrection we are forgiven of our sin and given access to eternal life. But *this life* is still pining. We are grateful for a loving, forgiving, merciful Savior but as we await his return, just like the Jewish people before us, we cry out – "*How long, O Lord? How long?*"
- When does the "sin and error" ever stop?

4. Questions to consider

- When you survey the world today, where do you see “sin and error”?
- When you examine your own life, where do you see “sin and error”?
- When you consider all the promises made in the Bible about how things will change, are you hopeful that it will happen or discouraged that nothing seems to have changed for humanity as a whole?
- While we are waiting for the return of Jesus, what should be the Christian response to the sin and error we see in the world?

5. Final thoughts and closing prayer

- Since the days of Adam and Eve human beings have lived with the presence of sin with no way to escape it. However, that does not mean that we have to live under the *power* of sin. One of the many benefits of the life and atoning death of Jesus Christ is that even with no way to remove ourselves from the presence of sin, Jesus has removed the consequence of sin for believers who repent. This was in no way something that we, as humans, had the power to do for ourselves, it is a free gift from God simply for believing in His Son. While the “sin and error” still abound, we are no longer chained to their eternal consequence. Thanks be to God for that!
- Let us pray: Gracious Lord, we cannot look in any direction without seeing the sin and error of the world and of ourselves. But just as prevalent, we cannot look in any direction without seeing your grace overcoming that sin. No matter where we cast our gaze, we see the evidence of the power of forgiveness in the very midst of sin. Thank you for that gift here and now, even as we continue to cry out “How long, O Lord?” until your final coming to renew all of creation. Amen.