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## *From Genesis to Jesus: Our Problem Genesis 2 and 3*

“...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Jesus. Literally, it means, “the Lord Saves.” What a wonderful name for a Messiah! He might have been named “the Lord Judges” or “the Lord Purifies” or “the Lord is **ticked** and you are in Deep Kimshee.” But the God-Visitor to earth was called Jesus. The Lord Saves. Wonderful! But it does raise a couple of questions, doesn’t it? **Who needs saving... and from what?**

Advent is the season that helps us prepare for the coming of our Savior. And many of us assume that the Saving God really his appearance for the first time in the early pages of Matthew. The Old Testament God...well, he’s grouchier, isn’t he? Picky? Irritable? Some go further. Some describe the Old Testament God as mean, vengeful, bloodthirsty. **Well, as a matter of fact, the Saving God of the Bible doesn’t wait until Matthew to make his appearance.** He appears in the first chapters of Genesis. And he reveals himself throughout the Old Testament... again and again. Did you know that?

So, I thought it would be fun to take a four-week trek through some of the salvation high points of the Old Testament. By the time we are done, I hope you will see the heart of our Heavenly Father, a God who adores us and has been working to save us since our fall. I also hope it will make you **hungry** for the coming of the Savior. We see glimpses of God’s salvation in the Old Testament. But it is only when our Saving God comes to visit us in person on Christmas Day...that God’s perfect and permanent salvation is revealed. Advent is **supposed** to be a season of anticipation and preparation. I pray that, by the time we read about the birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve, we will be SO grateful that, finally God’s perfect salvation has come.

Back to our first questions then. Who needs saving. And from what? Where do we find the answer to that? The very first book in the Bible. Genesis. Almighty God decides to create a universe. He does so out of nothing. He does so how? With words. He speaks light...he speaks the heavens...he speaks the earth and animals and plants into existence. And he declares them...what? Good! God didn’t have to create. But he wanted to. And he did. And it was good.

But God saves the high point of creation for last. In fact, we discover that the rest of God’s magnificent creation—all that he has spoken into existence so far— is really a playground for the zenith of God’s creative handiwork. What? Human beings. The grand finale of God’s creation is humanity. Chapter 1 is the Reader’s Digest condensed version of the story. God creates man as male and female in his own image. The first words about humanity dignify and elevate man and woman as essential partners in the stewardship of creation.

Then in chapter 2, we get more dirt. Literally. God is so excited to create the man that he gets his hands dirty. He doesn’t speak Adam into existence. He forms him from the earth. And then he **breathes** his Spirit into the man. Imagine—the divine lips sealed over the lifeless lips of Adam...the first instance of artificial resuscitation... only there’s nothing artificial about it. This is God-Life. God-Breath. Then God makes the man caretaker of this outdoor paradise. Wow. He has everything a guy could want, doesn’t he? But there is something missing. And for the first and only time in the creation story, God says something is NOT good. What?

Man was alone. So God gave Adam a helpmate...a perfect partner. In a very tender scene, God takes one of Adam’s rib and creates a woman: Eve. When Adam wakes up from his anesthesia and sees this sweet young thing standing in front of him, he cries, “Wow! Where have you been all my life!” OK, not literally. But I assure you, that is the idea. Now

everything **was** perfect. A perfect creation to explore, enjoy, eat from, tend to. A perfect life-partnership. This idyllic scene closes with these words: “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” No barriers, no boundaries, no guilt, perfect creation, perfect relationships. Perfect.

Last weekend the kids and I were invited to duck hunt in Sprague, Washington. I was excited, especially since this is Rachel’s senior year; I really didn’t care where we were going. But I had no idea how beautiful it would be. Our host has exclusive hunting rights to 50 square **miles** of land. Yes, **miles**. It was breathtaking. Four lakes, ten large ponds, a dizzying variety of landscapes from vast open fields to craggy volcanic outcroppings. A beautiful lodge, ATVs to ride on and a personal guide as we explored the 50 square miles—did I mention that it was **miles**—of paradise.

I can’t describe how awesome it was. We were so grateful to our host...for inviting us, giving us the run of the place, guiding us from one hidden treasure to another. It was magnificent! (And, yes, all three of the Toones got birds. We ate duck on Tuesday.) Out of a heart of generosity, our host said, “You can go anywhere, use anything I have...it is all yours to enjoy. But...this one area, you are not allowed to hunt. In fact, you can’t even carry a loaded gun here. Pay attention to the boundaries because if you are caught hunting here, you will be in big trouble.”

So...where do you think I hunted? No...I ’m not that stupid. Of course we stayed where we were supposed to...and we carefully avoided the forbidden area. Why? Because we love our host. Because we were grateful for his generosity. Because we wanted to honor the few boundaries he had established. Because we assumed he knew what he was talking about. Because we wanted to have fun. And because we didn’t want to get in trouble.

I wish our first parents had the same good sense. God gave them an exquisite garden to explore, to enjoy, to feast upon, to tend to, to care for. He was the ultimate host. A glorious gift offered; complete run of the place; no restrictions...**except for one**. Genesis 2:15. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”

That was it. One restriction. One limitation. One small boundary. You know what happens next. (READ Genesis 3: 1-13) Trouble in paradise. The Devil appears to Eve in the form of the serpent. He starts by twisting God’s words. “**Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”** Well...did he? No! Satan twists God’s words to make him look like a selfish killjoy. What did God say?” Eat up! Have at it. I made this all for you. Every tree in this garden is yours to enjoy! Except for **one**. For your own good, for your own protection, you must not eat from this one tree.”

Dirty Devil! What a deceiver. **But it’s not too late**. Temptation isn’t sin. Even Jesus was tempted. Eve can still pull the fat out of the fire. So how does she respond? **She twists God’s words, too!** “**We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’**” Did God say, “Don’t touch the tree?” Nope. Just, “Don’t eat the tree.” But the Deceiver has his effect. He twists Gods words to make him look stingy and mean...and Eve joins in and does the same.

What’s next? Then the Serpent calls God a liar. “**You will not surely die...For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**” God said that eating of that tree would bring death. The Serpent calls him a liar. Now listen: “**When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.**”

Eve believed the Devil’s lies. Suddenly, the one thing she couldn’t have was the one thing she HAD to have. Suddenly, all of the fruit...all of the bounty of the rest of the garden...was not enough. Only THIS forbidden fruit would satisfy. And even more, she **wanted** that forbidden wisdom. She wanted to know what she didn’t know. So she ate. And she gave it to Adam to eat. And he did. And it’s not like he didn’t know what was going on; not like she tricked him by giving him a morsel from some unknown source. Did you see? “**She also gave some to her husband...who was with her!**”

Men...here’s our darkest moment. Here is the moment where the male of the species abdicated his responsibility, went passive and allowed his family to perish. Adam was right there. He saw what was going on. God had given him the responsibility to care for and protect his wife. He could have rushed to her defense. He could have faced the Serpent down; threatened him or thrown himself in harm’s way. He could have pulled out the hoe and chopped off its head! He

could have at least weighed in on the conversation! But what does he do? He wimps out. He goes passive. He deserts her...and ever since then, it is the instinct of man to be passive, to abdicate his responsibility to protect and lead his family. It is the greatest barrier to authentic manhood and the greatest hindrance to healthy marriage and life-giving families...our tendency to be passive wimps in spiritual and moral matters.

What happens then? First, the **shame**. Then the **blame**. Suddenly, they realize that they are naked. And for the first time they are embarrassed. Pathetically, they try to hide themselves. With fig leaves, first. And then, when God comes to visit them, behind a bush. **And here is the first glimpse of the saving God in the Old Testament.** Can you hear the plaintive cry of the heartbroken father? “Where are you,” God cries out. Not, “Adam...where are you! Come here this instant. I’m going to count to 10 and you’d better be standing right in front of me.” No, it is, “Adam...my beloved...my creation...my joy...where are you? Why are you hiding from me? What have you done?” The first consequence of breaking God’s rules is always shame. We KNOW we’ve done wrong, it embarrasses us, and our instinct is to hide...from our responsibility...from transparency with each other...with our pathetic fig leaves...and even more foolishly, from God...who knows **exactly** where we are but calls out to us in the longing that we would be reconciled to him.

First comes shame. Then comes blame. God asks, “**Who told you** that you were naked. Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Did you hear Adam’s response? “**That woman** you put here with me—**she** gave me some fruit from the tree.” What does he do? He throws Eve under the bus! He’s not even man enough to take the blame for what he has done. He blames her. But that’s not all. **Who else does he blame? God!** “The woman **you put here with me...**” God, it’s **your** fault that I’ve done these things. Everything was fine until you gave that woman to me.”

“Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’” Now it’s Eve’s turn to shirk responsibility and pass on the blame. Of course it is true; the serpent did deceive. But she chose to believe his lies, chose to doubt God, chose to do the one thing she was forbidden to do.

You know the end of the story. God expels them from the garden. He curses the serpent and pronouncements judgment upon Adam and Eve. But these aren’t the words of a vengeful, nasty, angry God. They are the words of a brokenhearted parent. He tells them the consequences of their foolish action. It’s parenting with love and logic. Because of their rebellion, pain comes into the world. And broken relationships--with each other and with God. Because of their rebellion, even creation is harmed. The ground rebels; thorns and thistles bite, work becomes hard instead of joyful. And because of their rebellion, they will die.

All of those things are horrible. We need to be saved from all of them...rebellion, sin, pain, broken relationships, the abuse of God’s creation, death. But those are really secondary. What is the underlying sin that caused all of this in the first place? Like Eve, what do we human beings long for more than anything else? **We want to be God! We** want to decide what is right and wrong. **We** want to be the masters of our own fates. **We** want to live the way we choose, be married the way we choose, parent the way we choose, work the way we choose, play the way we choose, spend money the way we choose. **We** want to make the rules about sex with our boyfriend. We don’t want God setting limits on us because we don’t want him to be God. **We** want to be god.

This isn’t just Adam and Eve’s story. It is our story. It is still our story. It is still our sin. And it is why we still need a savior. It is the reason we want to cheat on our wife. It is the reason we want to neglect our children as a workaholic. It is the reason we want to be selfish and hoard everything we possess. It is the reason we get mad about tithing and giving. It is the reason we mistreat our neighbor and ignore the stranger. It is the reason we don’t give a damn about poverty and sickness and hunger and death in the rest of the world. Because **We** don’t want God calling the shots. **We** want to call the shots. **We** want to be God. But we are not. We cannot be. It kills us when we pretend we are. From this **more than any other thing**, we need to be saved. For this, Jesus ... “The Lord Saves” ...had to come.

So...are you still the pretender to your own throne? Are you so caught in shame and in blame that you cannot do the one thing that will save you? Surrender! Climb off the throne of your life. Only Jesus can sit there and only when you allow Jesus to be God...only then will he save you.

Today’s story is not just Adam and Eve’s story. It is our story. And we must decide whether to believe the serpent...or believe God about our lives and destinies. I’ll bet there are some here who need to climb off the throne of their lives; to stop pretending they are God. **Would you all repeat this prayer after me?** “I am not God. God is God. When I let God

be God, I flourish. When I pretend to be God, I die.” Be still with that a moment. Now, listen for God’s voice. Do you hear him coming to you ...as he came to Adam and Eve in the garden? Calling your name as he did theirs: “Adam, Eve, Mark, Jeremy, Shari ... where are you?” Answer God: “Here I am. I’m naked and ashamed, Lord. I admit that you are God and I am not. I’m tired of pretending that I’m God, tired of dying. Please save me. Please be the God of my life.”

## **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Some heretical groups over the centuries believed that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different gods. OT God was angry and punitive; NT God was gracious and forgiving. But the Old Testament also reveals a saving God. Can you think of OT stories that reveal this God of salvation?
2. Review together the major points of Genesis 1-2. Now, read all of Genesis 3 together. What was the only thing in creation forbidden to Adam and Eve? Why? Why did they disobey? What is the underlying sin that has continued to haunt every human being to this day...our truly ‘original sin?’
3. After the fall, we still see glimpses of a seeking/saving God. What are they?
4. What are the consequences of the curse? How do they continue to affect us to this day?
5. What glimpse do we see of a coming savior, even in these earliest Old Testament verses?