

*The Story: Starting Off With A Bang*

*By Jason Huff*

*Psalm 148, Romans 5:12-17, Genesis 2:4-9,16-18, 3:6-13,21-23*

Our final Scripture readings today are selections from Genesis 2 and 3. Listen now to God's Word. "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens -- and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground -- the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground -- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...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." The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ... 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. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." ... The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken."

Today marks the beginning of an exciting journey for us...a journey through the story of the Bible. Over the next several months, we're not going to cover every law or prophecy or read every theological argument the Bible makes. But what we will have, together, is an understanding of the plot. We're going to see God's big picture, how it involves all of humanity, and how it involves us. The narrative of Scripture is going to be revealed for us...and I believe and pray that we are going to have a really great time going through it.

There are books where it takes a hundred pages to get going. That's not the Bible. In fact, this is like one of those movies where if you step out for popcorn in the first five minutes, you're going to take a long time figuring out what you missed. As I see it, there are three "big bangs" within the first few chapters of Genesis that we read in the first chapter of *The Story*. There aren't how the universe was made, but instead the big bangs of creation, sin, and salvation.

Our first “big bang” starts with the opening line of Genesis – “In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth.” The very first thing we’re hit with out of the gate is the main character – God. He is a given from the very start. And that’s what we miss when we get too worried about how God made the universe or how long it took. The story of Genesis is not about the timeline of creation or an explanation for the universe; the story is about God. We learn that God is responsible for creating everything there is.

Now I want to point out to you a very important detail in Genesis 1. It’s that what we have is a beautiful poem that artistically shows how God made everything in an orderly and unified fashion. Take a look at the symmetry. On day 1, God creates light and separates it from darkness. On day 4, God provides the sun and moon – the physical means that separate darkness from light. On day 2, God separates the sea from the sky. On day 5, God creates all the creatures that live in the air and the water. Day 3 – God separates out the waters and makes land appear. Day 6 – God creates all the creatures that live on land. See how it all lines up?

What this means for us is that we don’t need to argue about whether God created the universe in an instant or in 6 24-hour days or over billions of our years. The opening of Genesis is about *God*. *He* is the creator; *He* is the master builder; *He* is the one who has control over all things. And take a close look at the language. God is so incredibly powerful that He merely speaks and His creation responds to Him. When God speaks, the text tells us, “it was so.” Sometimes I’ve heard scientists claim they don’t see God’s fingerprints on our world. The problem is, they’re looking for the wrong thing. They need a voiceprint. God spoke, and it was. God Himself created the science that we now use to try and understand how everything around us came to be!

And then creation takes its final magnificent turn in the creation of humanity. Everything else in creation, God forms and says it was good. God forms human beings and then looks at them, and He says that they are *very* good. The sun, moon, the stars, all the creatures, all the glories all around us in this vast universe...and the one thing God calls very good is you and me. The truth is, God loves us more than anything else in all of creation. He desires to be with us. In fact, in a minute we’ll see that God walked on the earth with Adam and Eve. He didn’t separate Himself from them but was relatable to them from the very beginning. He wants to be close to us. Throughout the story, we’re going to see just how true that is. And that should be reassuring to all of us. God is not out to get us. God wants to be in perfect relationship with us, the crown jewel of all He made.

The second “big bang” today is the story of the fall of humanity. What we heard today was the second story of creation that gets into the details of the story. God creates Adam from the dust of the earth and He puts him into the garden of Eden, a perfect sort of place with all sorts of trees. God knows that Adam needs another of his own kind, and so He creates the perfect complement to Him – woman. God establishes a relationship between them, man and woman, as the natural way of things. God has put together everything they need.

There is only one rule that God establishes – don't eat from those two trees over there, or you will die. The Hebrew is even more explicit than the translation we heard this morning. It says, "*In the day* you eat of it, you will surely die." It couldn't be more clear. God has given them a free choice. There is nothing else in the entire world forbidden to them. They have no knowledge of good and evil. They are blameless. All they must do is avoid the two trees, and all will be well.

Eventually, they get into a conversation with a serpent – later in the Bible, we'll read that this was actually Satan, an angel that established himself as the enemy of God. But what we see in Genesis 2 is the serpent presenting a different narrative...one where God doesn't have the humans' best interests at heart, a world where you can have knowledge and power like God. God is lying to you, the serpent says. Take and eat and you won't have to be bound to Him anymore. Then there is the fateful choice – Eve takes the fruit of the tree and eats it and then gives it to Adam with his full knowledge, and he eats it. All of a sudden, they are overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. It turns out the fruit came with tons of unexpected consequences.

Now you might be thinking to yourself, "What's the big deal? They ate fruit they weren't supposed to. Who cares?" From our own way of thinking – influenced itself by that choice – this makes a lot of sense. Of all the sins we can think of, is *this* the one that brings humanity down? It's the lamest sin in the book! But I want you to think of it another way. There was no other possible way for Adam and Eve to sin. Nothing else would break their relationship with God. The one sin they could commit, they did. Not only that, but they did it believing they would become like God themselves. This was not about a forbidden mango or apple or whatever. The best word for it is not even sin. The best word is treason. It was deliberate defiance of the relationship that God had established with them.

This shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us. Ever since that point, we have always been fighting our way into becoming our own little gods and pushing the one true God out of the picture. And just like Adam and Eve and the fig leaves they sewed for themselves, we've been all about the cover-up. Just like they hid from God, we've tried to hide our shame and our pain and all our shortcomings. But perhaps saddest of all, we see in this new world of sin that responsibility is replaced with passing the buck. Adam and Eve blame somebody else for their troubles. They can't admit that they themselves are to blame.

Sin totally damages us. It affects every part of our lives. The fallout from that event still reaches us. We are trapped in a godless way of thinking. As Genesis continues, we see the ramifications of it spill over into murder – the first son of Adam and Eve kills the second. In this era, sin runs rampant; by the time six generations have past, men boast of their killings. In the mystery of God's own emotions, He is grieved that He created humanity. Scripture says that "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." God decides at that time that not only will humans die, but their lifespans will be cut short. The earliest biblical stories say that people lived hundreds of years, but God finally says no. That kind of wickedness must eventually be punished with death.

And yet, in the midst of the sin and its devastation, we come across the third “big bang” of the opening of the Bible – the big bang of salvation. This “big bang” isn’t like the others. It’s not the brilliant wonder as the universe comes into being; and it’s not the raging inferno of sin that explodes on the scene. No, this third big bang of salvation is like a tiny spark set alight that nevertheless sends shockwaves throughout space and time.

The first sign of it we almost forget is right at the end of the curses God proclaim as a result of the fall. There are severe and devastating consequences to their choice. The frustrations of the work we do and the difficulty we have in our relationships is all traceable back to this moment. They get kicked out of Eden never to return. Everything is so bad that we wind up depressed just reading it. But if that’s all we see, we are missing God’s larger story.

You see, Adam and Eve don’t die...not right away, at any rate. If we understand the dates of the Old Testament correctly, Adam lives for 930 years. He lives ten lifetimes by the way we think of things. Yet God had said that Adam and Eve would die the very day they ate of the fruit. In one sense, they did; they fell away from God and lived with only a shadow of the relationship they had with Him in the garden. But in a very real sense, God had every right to stop right there and say, “Nope, you’re done.” The penalty for treason is death, especially when that treason is committed against a perfect and loving King. But God loved His prized creation too much to end it all right there.

How is it that God could spare them and yet be true to His own perfect sense of justice? We’re told as the passage continues, “The LORD God made animals skins for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” God didn’t just somehow create animal skins out of thin air for them. They came from an animal. What we have here is evidence of the first sacrifice. Adam and Eve will eventually face death centuries later for their sin, but they live to see another day. That’s because God met the demands of His perfect justice through a sacrifice He Himself carried out on their behalf. We see a hint that through sacrifice, God will provide a way around our disobedience and treachery, a way to accept us despite our fallenness. There are more sacrifices to come to atone for sin and there’s foreshadowing of God’s greatest gift to us in His Son, Jesus Christ...but that’s moving too far along in the book.

We see the spark of salvation continue in the story of Noah and the flood. God finally judges the world for its sinfulness by washing it clean of every living thing. Those who have lived for generations in wickedness will now die. But God doesn’t remove everyone and everything and start over from scratch. He chooses Noah, a righteous man, one who believes God and is willing to take on this massive construction project while his neighbors look on in scorn. Noah has a wife and sons, and they have wives, and none of them gets the same description. They are likely as corrupt as everybody else. Yet God is still willing to use them because of the faithfulness of one man. Now Noah is by no means perfect or sinless, but he trusts God, and God saves him and his family. God was under no obligation to do so, yet He did. His love for humanity meant that we would continue. Throughout history, God has made it clear that He will rescue those who truly love Him...maybe not in the moment, maybe not from the sufferings of this life, but His eternal salvation is a guarantee.

So what does the opening of the Bible tell us about ourselves for today? You can leave today knowing some powerful things. You are loved beyond measure. Each one of us is created in the image of God. We are the only thing in creation called “very good.” When you’re suffering, when you’re in pain, when you’re burdened with doubt or shame or grief, know that you have been made by a loving God who thinks more of you and me than the moon and the stars and the sun and everything else in the entire universe. His love for you runs that deep.

We are marred by sin; everything we do is tainted with it. That disobedience in the garden set off a chain reaction that plagues our whole world. It’s the most serious problem we face because it is what keeps us separated from God. It’s a dilemma without a solution because we have no way to make ourselves perfect, no way to erase the past.

But we are loved beyond measure, enough that God provides a solution. He shows Adam and Eve and all of humanity grace by holding back His judgment and slowing down the march of death. He shows Noah and his family grace by making a way for them through the flood. And God has shown us grace through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ to us. As we read along each week, we will see signposts along the way pointing to the need for a permanent solution. And through Christ, God has made the impossible possible...as the old song says, “God will make a way where there seems to be no way.” Thanks be to God, our creator, redeemer, and savior.